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International Students' Lived Experiences: A Review of Literature

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International Students' Lived Experiences: A Review of Literature

JANUARY 2022

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Global Context	10
Canadian Context	11
<i>Government Policy as a Lever to Increase in International Students' Numbers</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>International Students' Demographics</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Peel Context.....</i>	<i>18</i>
Project Purpose	20
Methodology.....	21
Pre-Arrival	22
<i>Choosing Canada and Specific Provinces/Cities</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Choosing the Institution.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Inaccurate Financial Expectations.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Visa Processes</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Recruitment Agents</i>	<i>25</i>
Experiences During Postsecondary Education	26
<i>Academic Experiences</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Institutional Support Services.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>One-Size-Fits-All Approaches</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Private/Public-Private Postsecondary Education Institutions.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Racism and Discrimination</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Social/Cultural Networks</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Health and Wellbeing.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Living Conditions</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Financial Challenges</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>COVID-19</i>	<i>36</i>
Transition into the Labour Market	37
<i>(Lack of) Professional Networks</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Need for Professional Support Services.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Discrimination in the Labour Market.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Canadian Work Experience</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Labour Market Outcomes</i>	<i>40</i>

<i>Settlement Services</i>	41
<i>Immigration Regulations and Processes</i>	42
<i>Employer's Lack of Understanding of the International Students' Immigration Status</i>	43
Recommendations Proposed by the Literature	44
Collaboration is Key	44
Holistic Approach to International Student Experience	45
<i>Pre-Arrival: Manage Expectations</i>	45
<i>During Postsecondary Education</i>	45
<i>Within the Academic Institution</i>	45
<i>Settlement & Immigration</i>	46
<i>Well-being: Economic, Social, and (Mental) Health</i>	47
<i>Transition into the Labour Market: Facilitate Access to Meaningful Work Experiences</i>	49
Change the Narrative	50
Don't Lose the Pulse: Research-Informed Practices	51
Conclusion	52
References	54
Appendix A	63

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Note: This is a review of academic literature on the international student experience in Canada and is not a case study of students' experiences at any one specific institution.

Table of Figures

Figure 1: International Study Permit Holders in Canada.....	11
Figure 2: Annual (October to September) New International Student Visas by Country	11
Figure 3: First-Time International Study Permit Holders in Canada.....	12
Figure 4: International Students with Study and Work Permits.....	13
Figure 5: International Study Permit Holders in Ontario.....	14
Figure 6: Study Permit Applications by Study Level	15
Figure 7: International Students as a Percentage of Student Body, By Sector and Province, Canada, 2018-2019	15
Figure 8: International Students' Academic Program Registration.....	16
Figure 9: 2020/21 International Students in Ontario by Sector	17
Figure 10: International Tuition Fees in Ontario.....	17
Figure 11: Designated Learning Institutions Operating in Peel Region.....	18
Figure 12: Partnership Model	44

International Students' Lived Experiences: A Review of Literature

Executive Summary

As international student populations continue to climb in Canada, there is a heavy impetus for the lived experiences of international students to be examined in order to better inform the infrastructure meant to support them throughout their journey in Canada. International students arrive from various locations with various experiences and multiple stakeholders are tasked with supporting their transition to Canada. These stakeholders are typically identified as educational institutions and relevant governmental bodies; however, researchers have identified the roles of far wider networks including employers, community organizations, healthcare workers, social welfare groups, and many more.

In an effort to unify these stakeholders and synergize their strengths to support international students, the *Improving International Post-Secondary Student Experience Advisory Roundtable* was struck to respond to ongoing and growing concerns about postsecondary international students' lived experiences in the city of Brampton and broader region of Peel. This report provides a comprehensive review of academic literature that examines international students' experiences in Canada, tying in media stories and meeting minutes within the Peel context when applicable to supplement the lack of academic literature concerning the Peel context.

This study is informed by the following research questions:

1. What does the literature tell us about the lived experiences of postsecondary international students in Canada before, during, and after their period of study?
2. What recommendations has the literature proposed to address the challenges international students face before, during, and after their period of study?

The review is placed within the global, Canadian, and Peel context. Globally, international student numbers continue to soar with three apparent motives for recruiting international students: economic motivation, immigration motivation, and geopolitical strategies. Canada takes up these three motives in stride and has successfully become a world leader in international education, with government policy acting as a strong lever to increase the international student population. Canada has undergone a series of immigration policy changes that position international education as a pipeline to immigration in the pursuit of retaining international students who are seen as 'ideal immigrants' due to their Canadian credentials and acculturation period (Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016; 2017). Within Ontario, which has the highest international student population of the provinces, Peel Region is home to 80 postsecondary Designated Learning Institution campuses, which can admit international students. However, only thirteen of these institutions offer programs that allow international students to be eligible for the Post-Graduate Work Permit (PGWP), which is integral to successful immigration.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to examine current research pertaining to the lived experiences of international postsecondary students in Canada. While academic literature comprises the bulk of the literature review, governmental, or 'grey,' literature was also reviewed to supplement key statistics not found in the academic literature concerning Peel. To ensure relevancy and reflection of major policy changes, literature dated before 2010 was not considered. Two gaps in the existing literature influenced the themes emerging in this report. First, there is very limited literature that examines international students' experiences in the private sector (private colleges and public-private partnerships). Second, there are less than a handful of studies that focus on the Peel context. To address this and to ensure that this report captures the Brampton/Peel-specific experiences, popular sources such as news stories and meeting minutes were included in subsections within the review. A total of 83 relevant sources were reviewed and thematically organized into categories following the journey of international students: pre-arrival; experiences during postsecondary education; and transition into the labour market.

Experiences Before Arrival

International students have a variety of reasons for selecting Canada, including prior friends & family, immigration policies, ability to work during and post studies, and global reputation for quality education and a tolerant, diverse country. Career and immigration opportunities are especially important to prospective international students, underlining the impact of key immigration policies that allow students to work while in Canada and envision a settled life. Specific provinces and cities are often chosen based on the combination of cost of living and tuition. Most students decide to immigrate before they arrive, but a significant portion make their choice during their stay, which is informed by social networks, course length, and settlement experiences of dependents. Institutions are chosen based on quality of education, popularity, and safety and security. Students are especially drawn to institutions with established programs and partnerships. Colleges are given special importance due to their shorter programs and focus on the labour market which allow international students to pay less tuition and enter the labour market more quickly. Financial planning appears to go awry for many students, finding that costs are much higher than expected. This is in some part due to inaccurate and/or missing information from recruitment agents, whom students rely on heavily in making decisions. Recruiters are employed by prospective students to deal with complex visa processes that are seen as stringent and complicated. Despite this important role of recruitment agents, international students perceive agents as a source of financial exploitation and abuse to be avoided if possible.

Experiences Once in Canada

On campus, international students tend to be content with their academic programs and see their institutions as welcoming. In fact, many students describe their institutions as home away from home. International students reportedly face academic challenges

relating to language proficiency and academic norms such as academic integrity. Nonetheless, international students tend to outperform their domestic peers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. The academic performance of international students has been found to be steadily increasing even as the total pool of international students is expanding.

Postsecondary education institutions have invested heavily in developing support services to their international students' body. Scholars observe that the diverse lives of international students are generally not captured by support services directed at the overly broad category of 'international students.' While this categorization is useful for administrative purposes to design programs and support eligibilities, the one-size-fits-all approach does not meet the needs of the very diverse international student body. Furthermore, support services at institutions tend to focus on the initial entry of international students. Services tailored to upper years and postgraduation such as career and immigration support services are found to be lacking. In private/public-private institutions, support services are largely missing and/or lacking, and cases of exploitation are reported.

While institutions offer many support services to international students, they often go unused in favour of informal supports such as friends, family, community organizations, or the Internet. This is due to lack of awareness, perceived discrimination, and lack of cultural relevancy. However, students tend to make use of certain supports such as language, academic, and financial services, which are seen to help overcome cultural/educational challenges and relieve financial stress. Some international students report feeling racialized and being viewed as cultural others. Linguistic and cultural differences are seen to serve as barriers to creating friendships with Canadians. International students report wanting to make friendships with Canadians.

International students also report negative health outcomes in terms of mental health (isolation, loneliness, depression) and in terms of physical health (diet change, lack of knowledge about the healthcare system).

Housing is a very large issue for international students due to lack of familiarity with the housing market/regulations, lack of connections, and linguistic/cultural barriers. Many cases of severe housing abuse and exploitation are reported as students do not often know their rights and are often in financially precarious positions.

Financially, international students are subjected to fluctuating exchange rates, reliance on family savings, and rising tuition fees, which create many budgeting challenges. Additionally, financial support is seen as incredibly lacking with regards to financial aid programs, scholarships, and job opportunities while studying. COVID-19 served to amplify and compound the foregoing challenges. While international students are not eligible for governmental relief programs, they are proactively supported in part by their educational institutions.

Experiences with Transition to the Labour Market

Heading into the labour market, the literature reports significant challenges that international students face due to a perceived networking disadvantage, both in terms of the size/quality of their network and knowledge of how to network in the Canadian context. International students are vocal in their desire for career supports such as networking, job boards, and internship/co-op offerings. Canadian experience is seen as highly prized in the labour market and proves to be a significant challenge for students.

In both their jobs and job searches, international students report feelings of being discriminated against due to their immigration status, race, culture, language ability, and more. Employers are also seen as having a general perception of international students as high-risk hires due to immigration red tape. Employers are seen as unwilling to hire international students due to their ignorance of immigration policies and procedures and return on investment uncertainty (i.e., concerns whether the international student will remain in Canada). The foregoing challenges have resulted in a significant income gap between domestic and international graduates.

In terms of settlement, international students often find themselves ineligible for many settlement services due to their immigration status. Settlement experiences of dependents is also seen to be very important for international students. Immigration processes are seen as confusing, discouraging, frustrating, and volatile. Students report a lack of support in navigating these processes, and that they are much more difficult in Ontario than in other provinces. It is also found that international students have very limited support with permanent residency (PR) applications from their educational institutions as well as settlement agencies.

Recommendations

A series of recommendations based on the literature is outlined in this report. Four major themes emerge: trans-organizational collaboration; holistic student support approach; changing harmful narratives; and engaging in research-informed practice.

Collaboration is found to be of incredible importance with respect to the support of international students. All stakeholders are urged to develop strong and effective relationships with each other to increase opportunities for synergy, wherein organizations can utilize their strengths to fill gaps in other organizations' capacities to create more effective services. Collaboration also enables large-scale work, allowing smaller organizations with specific and relevant knowledge to expand their reach. Lastly, in connecting with other organizations, greater transparency is also achieved in the sharing of information, which allows the whole support structure to reduce redundancy in programming and more effectively utilize resources.

Collaboration also helps to enable holistic student supports. Given that academic, social, and professional factors all contribute to each other, it is found that a support system must be created that supports the whole student. This is to say that the student

should be supported before they arrive, during their education, and as they transition into the labour market, and in the widely varying aspects of their lives, such as academics, housing, mental health, and more. These support services need to be as specific, tailored, and relevant as possible in order to effectively accommodate the unique needs of the international students that are being welcomed to Canada.

In order to create a welcoming atmosphere, a large change in the narratives surrounding international students in the media and public discourse needs to occur. There is growing discourse that opposes international student recruitment and retention under the guise of putting domestic citizens first. This discourse is harmful in that it wrongfully labels international students as competitors rather than contributors, which inevitably harms the whole system. This is found to lead to anti-immigration/nationalist policies and racist incidents in other international jurisdictions. To avoid these negative consequences, informed and well-curated media narratives that inform the public discourse are required, which is to say (international) education academics and professionals must use their voices to contribute positively to the narrative.

Lastly, those who support international students must also keep a pulse on the latest research with which to inform their practices. The body of research is constantly expanding with updated theory and best practices that can serve as tools for stakeholders to use to address various target areas. This also means regularly conducting research, such as student surveys, interviews, etc. This allows practices to be more appropriately informed by local needs, whether they are informed by student voice, community needs, and different stakeholders' perspectives.

The report also identifies key gaps in the research that can be filled. These areas are: international students' experiences within the private sector; examinations of support structures from a holistic, collaborative view; institutions' internationalization strategies and their connection to labour demands; and differences between international students' experiences at different educational institutions in the Peel region.

Introduction

With steadily increasing international student populations in Canada, researchers have identified the need to examine their lived experiences in order to inform the various members that comprise the ecosystem of support for international students transitioning to study and, in many cases, life in Canada.

Researchers have typically focused on examining the role of key actors who are interested, invested, and have responsibility to support international students. These actors are most often identified as the postsecondary institution of study and the relevant governmental departments such as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and Global Affairs Canada (GAC) at the federal level, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU), and the Ministry of Citizenship, and Immigration, and International Trade (MCIIT) at the provincial level. Recently, researchers have recognized the key role of a wider network which includes employers, community organizations, healthcare workers, social welfare groups, local municipalities and many more.

Similar to many cities in Canada, and especially in the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario, international students are an important part of the community in Brampton, a populous municipality located within Peel Region (henceforth referred to as Peel). They play an important role in the Brampton community and add to the city's rich, ethnocultural fabric and contribute to the city's economic prosperity. In response to ongoing, yet growing, concerns about postsecondary international students' lived experiences in the city of Brampton and Peel, the *Improving International Post-Secondary Student Experience Advisory Roundtable* was convened as part of a coherent strategy of community engagement. To inform the work of this committee, this report presents a literature review of academic research that seeks to understand the international student experience as they navigate the vast ecosystem of education, settlement, and immigration in Canada.

The report starts by outlining the global and local policy contexts that led to an increase in international students and a change in their demographics and end goals. Next, the report focuses on outlining international students' experiences in Canada. Given the limited academic literature that focuses on the international students' experiences in Peel and knowing that the literature on international students' experience in diverse locations in Canada tends to highlight very similar broader challenges, this report will present the themes and tie them with the Peel context through referencing media stories when possible. Main challenges are identified with respect to international student experiences, seen from a holistic view that examines services both in and out of academic institutional contexts. Finally, in reviewing the relevant literature, pertinent recommendations made in the literature are summarized in order to inform change in Brampton and gaps in the research are identified as future areas of research that may provide key data to drive change in Peel.

Global Context

International student mobility has been expanding quite consistently in the past 20 years. In 2019, 6.1 million tertiary students worldwide had crossed a border to study, more than twice the number in 2007. The number of international postsecondary education students grew on average by 5.5% per year between 1998 and 2019 (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021). Top destinations for internationally mobile students include many top-ranked postsecondary education institutions in countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom.

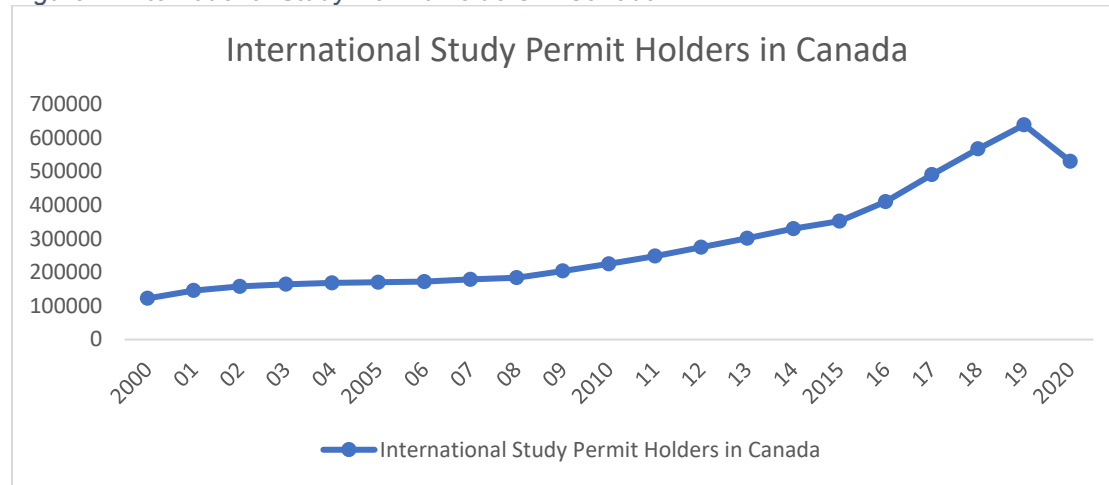
While internationalization has much to offer countries and is taken up differently in each one, three major motives are identified for governments' engagement in and interest to increase the number of international students at their countries' postsecondary education institutions. First, international students are seen to be an incredible boon to the economy of a nation (Aloyo & Wentzel, 2011; Hegarty, 2014; Ortiz et al., 2015), contributing multiple billions of dollars annually in fees and domestic participation (Consterdine & Everton, 2012; Group of Eight Australia [GEA], 2014). Beyond these main economic contributors, internationalization proves to create spillover benefits such as job creation, tourism, and the filling of skills shortages (GEA, 2014; López et al., 2016). Tied to the economic motive is immigration, wherein countries seek international students as future immigrants who can meaningfully contribute to the economy. The connection between immigration and economic benefit is made clear by many countries' policies, wherein potential for immigration is linked to the student landing a skilled job after graduation such as is the case in the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, United States, and Canada (Consterdine & Everton, 2012; Spinks & Kolet, 2016). Thirdly, internationalization is often used as a geopolitical tool to increase a country's 'soft power,' being the promotion of a country's interests without the use of direct influence or force (Mok & Ong, 2014; Popa, 2014; Rui, 2012; Trilokekar, 2010).

Postsecondary education institutions' rationales for recruiting international students include enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education; building a stronger international and intercultural dimension to teaching and learning; bringing global perspectives to the local student body; fostering international research links; and providing an opportunity to generate revenue (AUCC, 2002; Cudmore, 2005; El Masri, 2019; 2020; Galway, 2000; Jones and Olesksiyenko, 2011).

Canadian Context

In 2019, Canada has become the world's third leading destination of international students after the United States and Australia, with a staggering 638,960 foreign students (IRCC, 2021).

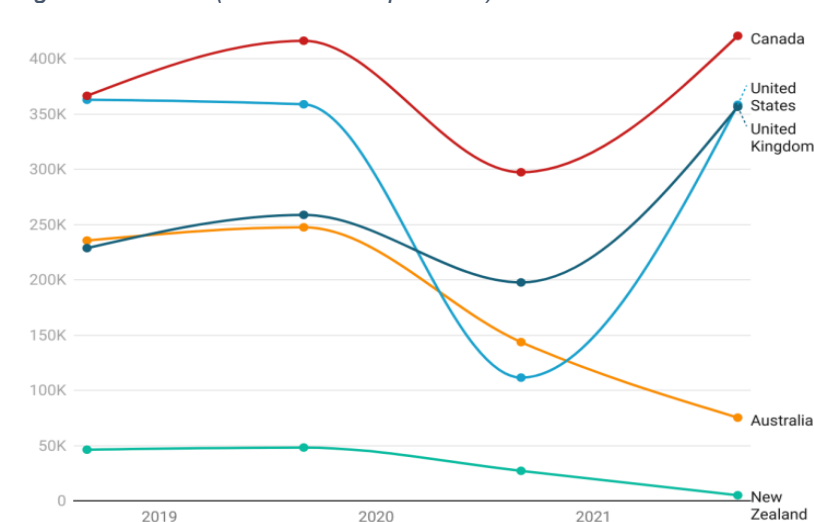
Figure 1: International Study Permit Holders in Canada



Source: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2021)

While this declined to 530,540 in 2020 due to COVID-19, Canada maintained its global ranking (IRCC, 2021). Hurley, Hildbrandt and Brisbane (2021) report that while there was a reduction in new student visas between October 2019 and September 2020, the level recovered during the twelve-month period of October 2020 to September 2021. Compared to other international jurisdictions, Canada had the highest number of international students' visas issued during the pandemic (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Annual (October to September) New International Student Visas by Country



Source: Hurley, Hildbrandt and Brisbane (2021)

The number of new international students (first-time study permit holders) in Canada has increased steadily since the mid-2000s, and it reached 256,220 in 2020. In 2021, this number has increased to 353,960, as illustrated in Figure 3, without including data from November-December as it is not yet available at the time of writing (IRCC, 2021). Increased efforts are being made to attract international students as a potential pool of candidates for permanent residency (PR) and the Canadian labour force (Crossman et al., 2021).

Figure 3: First-Time International Study Permit Holders in Canada



*2021 November and December data not included as it is unavailable at the time of writing.

Source: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2021)

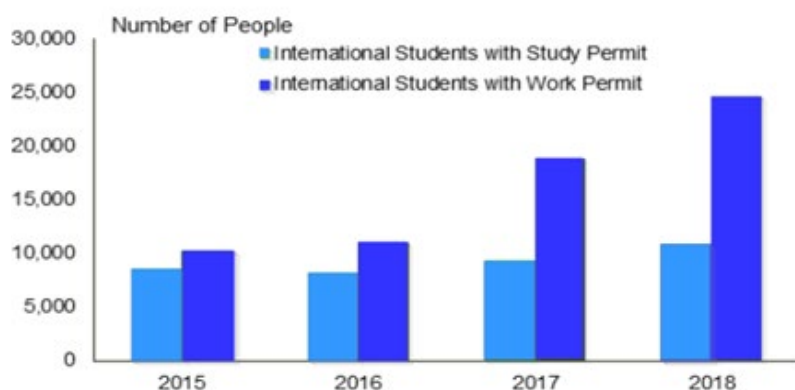
Government Policy as a Lever to Increase in International Students' Numbers

This massive increase in international student numbers in Canada is not a coincidence. It is an outcome of collective efforts of federal and provincial governments as well as postsecondary education institutions. Scholars observe that federal and provincial governments have been formulating an aggressive marketization approach to benefit from the intensified global competition (Tamtik, 2017, p. 1). There is an acknowledgement that international students contribute to Canada's economy. It is estimated that in 2018, international students in Canada "contributed an estimated \$21.6 billion to Canada's GDP and supported almost 170,000 jobs for Canada's middle class" (GAC, 2019).

Canada, similar to many other OECD countries, faces demographic challenges; hence, it is increasingly dependent on immigration. International students are perceived as "ideal candidates for permanent residency" as they "are young, have Canadian educational qualifications and in-demand labour skills, and are proficient in one of our official languages" (GAC, 2019). Canada's first ever International Education Strategy released in 2014 and the subsequent strategy released in 2019 stressed the goal of not only increasing the number of international students in Canada but also retaining them

as immigrants (GAC, 2014; 2019). To facilitate the retention of international students Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) introduced changes in 2013 to the International Student Program¹ to facilitate international students' work post-graduation and retention in Canada. Since then, there has been a steady increase in the number of international students with work permits, which is a step towards permanent residency (Figure 4). This has influenced the type of students Canada attracts as recent surveys indicate that 60% of international students plan to apply for permanent residence in Canada (CBIE, 2020). In fact, nearly 54,000 former students became permanent residents in Canada in 2018 (GAC, 2019). Statistics Canada (2021) reports that since 2000, three out of every ten international students achieve permanent residency within ten years.

Figure 4: International Students with Study and Work Permits



Source: Thanabalasingam & El Baba (2019)

Ontario is by far the largest beneficiary of foreign students in Canada as it hosts the highest per cent of international students among Canadian provinces. Consistent with the federal economic and immigration policies, the government of Ontario announced in *The 2010 Open Ontario Plan* its target to increase the number of international students in Ontario colleges and universities by 50% to a total of 57,000 students in five years by 2015; by 2012-13, Ontario had exceeded its target ahead of schedule with approximately 59,000 international students enrolled in Ontario postsecondary education institutions (Humphries et al, 2013). Ontario's *International Postsecondary Education Strategy 2018* commits to increasing international students in Ontario as they "contributed \$7.8 billion to the Ontario economy in 2016, supporting thousands of jobs across the province" and perceives international students as a "talent pipeline" to be retained in the province (Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, 2018, p.5). Ontario, as well as other provinces, has been active in leveraging international students as a potential and desirable pool of future immigrants. *Ontario's Immigration Strategy* (2012), developed by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI), calls for "[m]aximiz[ing] the potential of...international students" through better

¹ The International Student Program is a category of temporary residents in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act which enabled international students to stay in Canada for up to three years following graduation and reduced Canadian work experience requirement for permanent residency from 24 to 12 months.

promotion of immigration programs (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration 2012, p. 7).

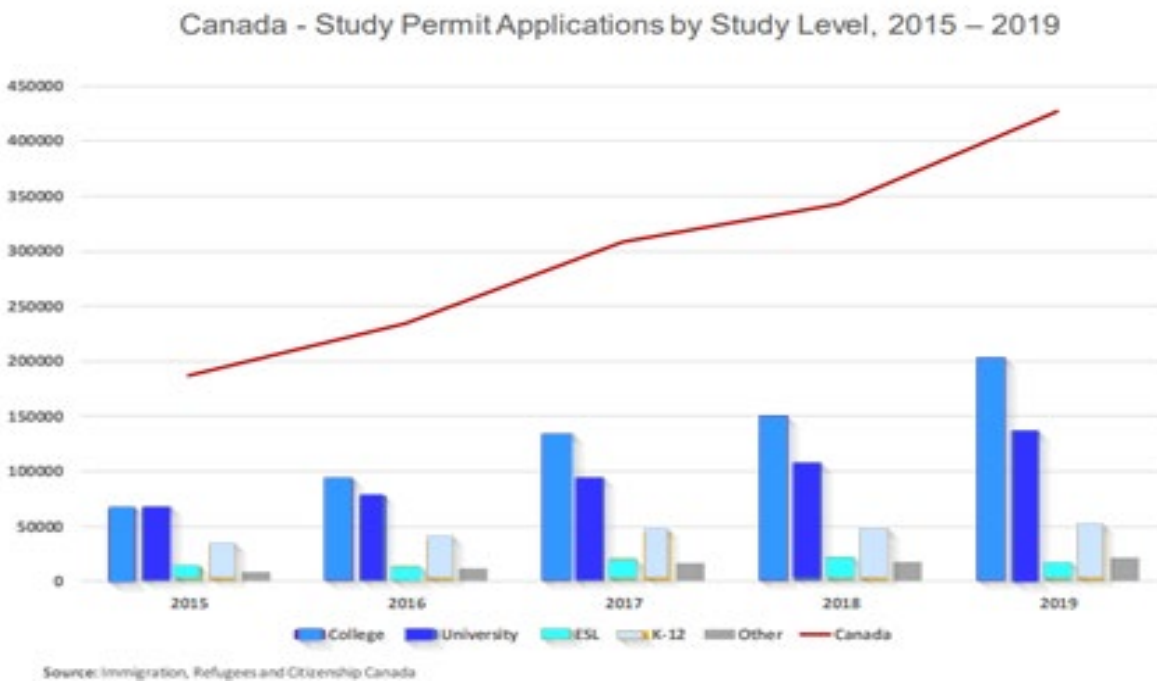
In 2020, Ontario hosted 46 per cent of Canada's international student population—242,825 people (IRCC, 2021). While the number of international students increased in all provinces, Ontario consistently attracted the largest share of international students, and this share increased from 37.4% in the 2000-to-2004 cohort to 48.9% in the 2015-to-2019 cohort, where the main growth in the college sector almost doubling (Crossman et al., 2021). Since 2009, the Ontario College system has experienced a dramatic growth in international students (Figure 6). Over 50% of new international students in Ontario were headed to colleges. Currently, there is a total of 85,458 (17%) of 539,468 students in the university sector in Ontario (MCU, 2021) and a total of 96,218 (28%) full-time international students of 348,350 students in the college sector (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario [OAGO], 2021).

Figure 5: International Study Permit Holders in Ontario



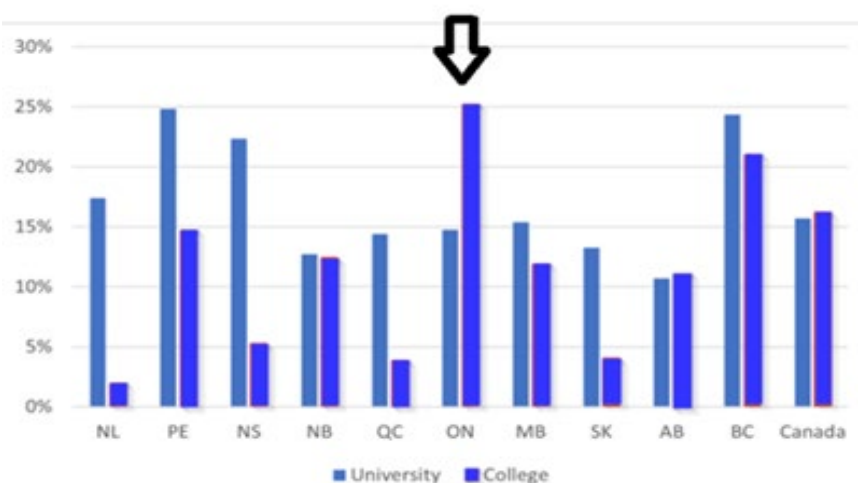
Source: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2021)

Figure 6: Study Permit Applications by Study Level



Decock et al. (2016) argue that the international student growth far exceeds that of ministry-funded students at the system level. In a closer examination of individual colleges, international students are compensating for a decline in domestic students in colleges and have allowed for the continual growth in student enrolment (Figure 7). International student growth rates are at least 10x higher than ministry-funded students in all regions of Ontario and have become an increasingly larger percentage of the student bodies (Decock et al., 2016).

Figure 7: International Students as a Percentage of Student Body, By Sector and Province, Canada, 2018-2019



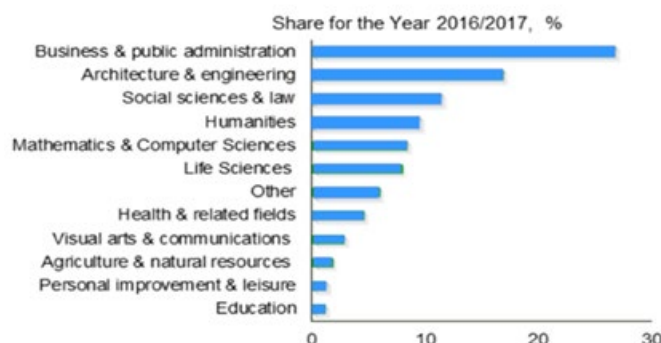
Source: Usher, 2020a

International Students' Demographics

In terms of demographics, international students (compared to domestic students) tend to be older (21-30); male; have a first language other than English; a university degree; be more likely to want to pursue further study if they entered college directly from high school; be less likely to have a job and/or support dependents (Decock et al., 2016).

International students are more inclined to join programs in business & public administration, architecture and engineering, and social sciences and law and less likely to join programs in education, agricultural and natural resources (Thanabalasingam & El Baba, 2019).

Figure 8: International Students' Academic Program Registration



Source: Thanabalasingam & El Baba, 2019

In keeping with global trends, students from India and China make up over half of all new international students (IRCC, 2021; Williams et al., 2015). This was aided by the introduction of the Student Partners Program (SPP) in 2009 which facilitates the enrolment of those who are planning to study and work in Canada in Canadian community colleges. A CBIE (2018) report notes that while Canada had one of the most diverse international student populations with 186 nations represented in 2017, this diversity has declined in recent years with 65% of all international students in Canada originating from the top five countries of citizenship: China, India, South Korea, France and Vietnam.

The majority of international students in Ontario (79%) are enrolled in the public sector. 10% are enrolled in public-private partnership colleges and 11% are enrolled in private career colleges (Figure 9). There is an increase in international students' enrolment in the public-private colleges whose fees are lower than similar programs at public institutions (OAGO, 2021; Usher, 2020b). The Office of the Auditor General of Ontario (2021) has recently expressed concerns over public-private partnerships exceeding the limit on international students' enrolment (sometimes twice the amount of home campus enrolment).

International Students' Lived Experiences

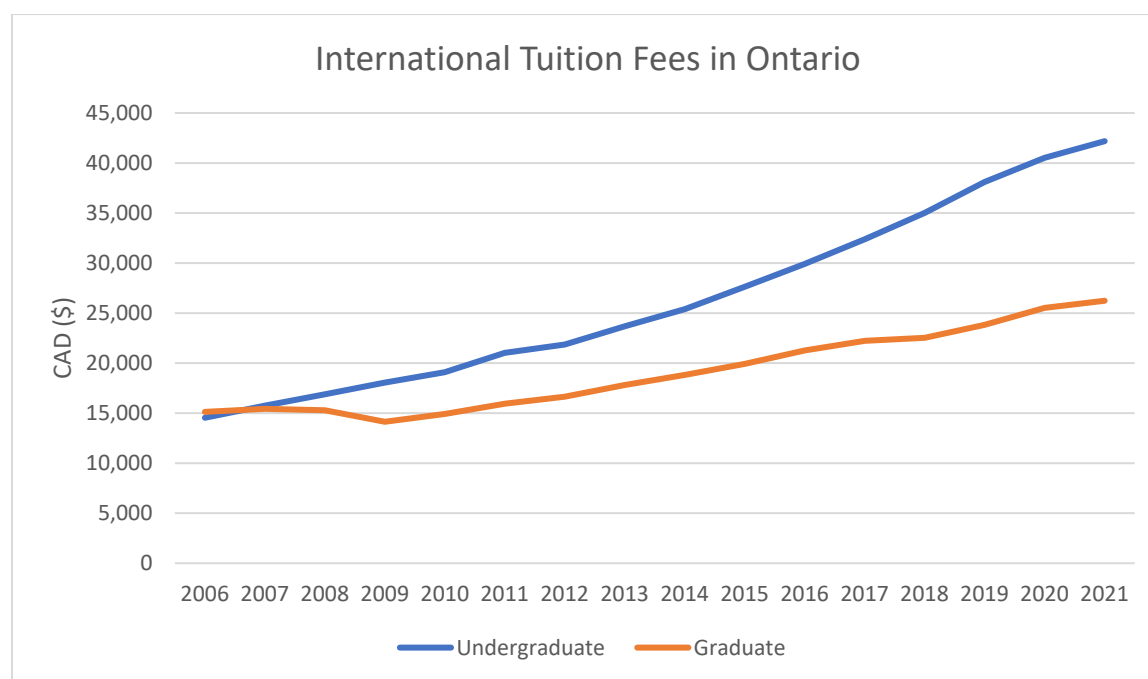
Figure 9: 2020/21 International Students in Ontario by Sector

Total IS Enrolment	242,825 (100%)	
Public	190,935 (79%)	
	<u>University</u> 85,458 (35%)	<u>College</u> 104,937 (44%)
Public-Private	24,031 (10%)	
Private	27,859 (11%)	

Source: IRCC (2021); OAGO (2021); Ontario's Universities (2021)

The average tuition fees for international students in Canada has increased over the years with those fees accounting for a growing share of revenues for postsecondary education institutions (Statistics Canada, 2020). Similarly, international students' fees in Ontario have steadily been increasing since 2006, particularly for undergraduate studies (Figure 10).

Figure 10: International Tuition Fees in Ontario



Source: Statistics Canada (2021)

Peel Context

Peel Region has a diverse population of more than 1.4 million people, predicted to increase to around 2 million in 2041. Peel has the second highest municipal population in Ontario and the highest proportion of immigrants in the GTA (at 50.5%) (Region of Peel, 2011).

Peel region is home to 80 postsecondary Designated Learning Institutions² (DLI), i.e., academic institutions approved by a provincial or territorial government to host international students. These DLIs can be categorized into public, public-private partnership, and private as illustrated in Figure (11).

1. Public institutions: Sheridan College has two campuses in Peel: one in Mississauga and the other in Brampton. There are two public universities on IRCC's DLIs list Algoma University (Brampton) and the University of Toronto (Mississauga). It is important to note that Ryerson has some ancillary offerings in Brampton (incubator) as well as continuing education. However, Ryerson Brampton Campus is not on IRCC's list of Designated Learning Institutions yet. Furthermore, Brampton City Council approved a motion in June to work with the University of Guelph- Humber to move its Etobicoke campus to downtown Brampton.
2. Public-Private: Peel hosts 8 public-private partnerships campuses where Ontario public colleges with main campuses outside of Peel partnered with private colleges with campuses in Peel. On one hand, this allows the public college to expand its operations to Peel and increase its enrolment, and, on the other hand, it allows the private college to host international students and offer programs that allow students to apply for Post-Graduation Work Permit. There are eight public - private partnership campuses in Peel: 4 in Brampton and 4 in Mississauga.
3. Private: Peel region hosts a total of 187 registered private career colleges¹. Of those, 68 are DLIs (23 in Brampton, 44 in Mississauga and 1 in Caledon)

Figure 11: Designated Learning Institutions Operating in Peel Region

City	Total number of DLIs ³	Public Institutions	Public- Private Partnerships	Private Career Colleges
Mississauga	50	2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Toronto • Sheridan College 	4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canadore College at Stanford International College of Business and Technology • Lambton College at Queen's College of Business, Technology and Public Safety 	44

² This number represents campuses. Therefore, a private career college with multiple campuses is counted more than once.

³ This number represents campuses. Therefore, a postsecondary education institution with multiple campuses is counted more than once.

International Students' Lived Experiences

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology at triOS College Business Technology Healthcare Inc • St. Clair College at ACE Acumen Academy 	
Brampton	29	2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algoma University • Sheridan College 	4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambrian College of Applied Arts and Technology at Hanson College of Business, Health and Technology • Canadore College at Stanford International College of Business and Technology • Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology at Trios College • St. Clair College at Ace Acumen Academy 	23
Caledon	1	-	-	1
Total	80	4	8	68

Source: [Designated learning institutions list - Canada.ca](https://designatedlearninginstitutions.ca/)

*Refer for Appendix A for a full list of DLIs in Peel

Of those 80 DLIs, only 13 offer Post-Graduate Work Permit eligible programs. Those constitute the public institutions and the public-private partnerships in addition to the one private college in Caledon. Post-Graduate Work Permits allow international students to stay in Canada for eight months to three years after their graduation and be eligible to work. If they are able to secure a high-skilled job, they are then eligible to apply for permanent residency (PR) in the Federal Express Entry program.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a summary of academic literature that pertains to the lived experiences of international students in Canada to help inform the work of the *Improving International Post-Secondary Student Experience Advisory Roundtable* and the upcoming Summit in March/April 2022 convening key stakeholders in Peel in order to improve the experiences of international postsecondary students in the region.

This literature review is informed by the following research questions:

1. What does the literature tell us about the lived experiences of postsecondary international students in Canada before, during, and after their period of study?
2. What recommendations has the literature proposed to address the challenges international students face before, during, and after their period of study?

The literature review examines each stage of an international student's journey before and during their time in Canada, both inside and outside of their institution of study.

Key challenges and thematic experiences are outlined. Given the limited academic literature and case studies that focus on international students' experiences in Peel in general and Brampton in specific, this report references media reports and minutes of different committees' meetings whenever possible.

On top of providing information about the lived experiences and challenges of international students in Canada, this report also seeks to summarize and share the recommendations of scholars who have studied international students' experiences intently. These recommendations are outlined in order to serve as potential directions for change in Peel and outline some research gaps. Identifying these gaps is an integral part of the path forward with respect to the international student support system in Brampton/Peel as addressing these gaps with future research can provide key data with which region-specific change can be effectively made.

Methodology

Comprehensive searches using Google Scholar, the Sheridan library system, and the York University library system were conducted of academic sources in the pursuit of compiling peer-reviewed works pertaining to the following search terms:

- “International”
- “Student Experiences,” “Student Voices,” “Student Lives”
- “Students”
- “Postsecondary Institutions,” “Higher Education,” “Tertiary Education”
- “Universities,” “Colleges,” “Private Career Colleges”
- “Canada,” “Ontario,” “Peel,” “Brampton”

Further resources were located within the researchers' pre-existing collection of academic materials relevant to the project's purpose. Governmental documents, or “grey” literature, were also reviewed to supplement key statistics not found in the academic literature. Acknowledging the very limited academic literature that focuses on international students' experiences in Peel, and more specifically Brampton, reference is made to committees' minutes of meetings and media stories where applicable. To ensure that we differentiate between the two data sources, the data from media stories is presented separately within each theme.

Results were refined using various filters. All results exclude literature published prior to 2010. This decision was made to ensure relevancy of findings which reflects the various policy and broader contextual changes presented earlier. Only results that examined the Canadian context were reviewed in order to accurately capture the context within which this review seeks to operationalize.

A total of 83 relevant academic studies were reviewed, all of which focus on the international student experience in the postsecondary education sector. They were then organized into relevant categories:

- Pre-Arrival: This category refers to any study that examines the experiences of international students before they arrive in Canada, such as their experience with outreach and recruitment.
- Experiences during Postsecondary Education: This category captures any study that examines the experiences of international students while they are enrolled at a Canadian postsecondary education institution. This includes their experiences within their academic institution and/or with their host community.
- Transition into the Labour Market: This section reviews studies that examine the international student experience just prior to and after graduation, as the student seeks to find employment in Canada.

The recommendations from all studies reviewed were systematically extracted, reviewed, summarized, and presented in the recommendations section.

Themes Emerging from the Literature Review

The literature review is broadly structured along the lines of the international student's experience of their pathway to and through Canada. The review begins by examining the international students' experience pre-arrival to Canada, with outreach and recruitment. It then examines their experience while enrolled at a postsecondary institution, both on and off campus. It concludes the international students' journey by examining their transition into the labour market and concomitant immigration experiences.

It is important to note that most of the available literature examines international students' lived experiences at public postsecondary education institutions with a handful of studies that briefly touch on the private institutions and/or public-private partnerships. There has not been any research to examine if international students' experience differs from one type of institution to the other or from one location in Peel to the other.

In each section, the report outlines themes identified by the academic literature and given the limited quantity of Peel-focused academic literature, articles from the media and/or minutes of meetings are referenced, when possible, to tie in the Peel context.

Pre-Arrival

Five key themes emerge from the academic literature surrounding international students' experiences prior to arriving in Canada. The literature focused on student choices of both Canada and their institution, as well as areas of challenge such as lack of clarity in terms of financial obligations, complicated visa processes, and exploitation of recruitment agents.

Choosing Canada and Specific Provinces/Cities

International students choose to study in Canada for a multitude of reasons: reputation of the education system in Canada; perceptions of a tolerant and non-discriminatory society, reputation of Canada as a safe country; opportunity to work during and after their studies; and prospects of migrating to Canada through welcoming immigration policies (CBIE, 2018). Having prior friends and family who live or have lived in Canada (and a particular province/city) is also a major factor (British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer [BCCAT], 2015; Chira, 2013).

One of the most commonly given reasons for studying in Canada is related to career opportunities, the potential for career advancement and the opportunity to immigrate to Canada (CBIE, 2018; El Masri et al., 2015; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016). Consequently, Canadian immigration policies undeniably play an important role in either increasing (or decreasing) the attractiveness of Canada as a study destination (Lowe, 2011;

Trilokekar, Thomson and El Masri, 2016). For many international students, the return on investment in the form of employability outcomes and immigration prospects is a factor influencing their decisions when looking at where to study (Esses et al., 2018; Morris-Lange & Brands, 2015; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar et al., 2014). A CBIE survey reveals that for the majority of international postsecondary students in Canada, the opportunity to work during and after their studies is a key driver for deciding to study in Canada (CBIE, 2018). The ability to work helps international students envision a settled life in Canada, as indicated in the high interest in permanent resident status. This is reflected in the increase in international students' intentions to apply for permanent resident status in Canada, an increase from 51% in 2015 to 60% in 2018 (CBIE, 2018).

Peel In the Media

"Seeing limited opportunities for their children in their own country, rural families in India – particularly Punjab – are pushing them to seek a better life overseas" ... "a drive through the city suggests the aspirations of its residents lie elsewhere. "Study in Canada" billboards sit atop buildings, 'Settle Abroad'" (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

It used to be that students came from the bigger cities in India, often with a degree under their belts and some measure of worldliness. Now, they are coming in increasing numbers from smaller municipalities and farming villages too, often departing right after finishing high school, say consultants in India and advocacy groups in Canada interviewed by The Globe (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

When it comes to specific Canadian provinces and/or cities, the cost of living and tuition play a role as students weigh the total costs of Canadian regions against each other (Chira, 2013).

Peel In the Media

International students reported coming to Peel because of popular culture depictions, family and friends' experiences, and recruiter guidance (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

While most immigrating international students set their mind to do so before their arrival, a significant portion make the decision to apply for immigration as a result of their time in Canada (Chira, 2013; Esses et al., 2018). Factors that facilitate a decision to stay in Canada are the settlement experiences of their accompanying spouse/families; longer courses of study which tends to correlate with higher likelihood to stay within the location of study; and a social network that consists of a mixture of Canadian and international students (Chira, 2013; Esses et al., 2018).

Choosing the Institution

International students identify several reasons that guide their decision-making with

respect to their choice to take up study at specific Canadian institutions. Quality of education is seen as the primary reason for institutional selection, ahead of popularity and safety and security (BCCAT, 2015; Belkhodja & Esses, 2013; Li & Tierney, 2013). Students are drawn to established programs and/or partnerships that provide extra value and credibility to a given institution (Chira, 2013). Additional value has been increasingly seen in colleges by international students due to shorter programs, lower tuition, increased focus on the labour market, greater access to employment, and a perceived smoother immigration route (Decock et al., 2016).

Peel In the Media

It is reported that colleges, and especially private colleges, are chosen in many cases as an easier way of securing permanent residency (Callan, 2021).

“At Broadway Consultants, a study-abroad consultancy in Patiala, 80 per cent of students choose to go to Brampton because there are so many private colleges in the city, which are seen as more affordable and easier to gain admission to with a lower language proficiency score. “It’s not the degree they are after, but a route to a better life and money, says Broadway’s executive director, Baljinder Singh” (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

Inaccurate Financial Expectations

International students report feeling misled by the information they received with regards to financial obligations in that they were not made aware of significant costs or that amounts of costs were misrepresented (BCCAT, 2015; Chira, 2013; Peel Newcomer Strategy Group [PNSG], 2018). However, it is unclear which sources are being referred to (i.e., whether students are referring to information from their peers, official websites, recruiters, ... etc.). The discrepancy between expectations and incurred costs causes a frustrating experience that can have spillover effects into other budgeted items. Upon learning about some of the real costs they had to pay, international students go so far as to not recommend moving to either Brampton or Mississauga for reasons such as the inflated cost of car insurance and increasing cost of living (PNSG, 2018).

Peel In the Media

“Mani’s expectations of life in Canada were coloured by the WhatsApp profile pictures of fellow villagers who had left to study abroad. Some had Niagara Falls as the backdrop, others posed in front of newly purchased cars or large houses. Once he left his village of Chak Sarai in Punjab, he imagined he would move into a palatial home and spend weekends exploring his new country’s natural beauty” (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

“Mr. Sarwara finally got admission to CDI College to study web design, and his family took a loan of \$20,000 to pay for it. After two and a half years, he found himself routinely asking his parents to wire him more cash to keep up with his expenses” (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

Visa Processes

One key problem area is that of the visa processes and challenges that international students face before they arrive. International students have to indicate they have enough income to support themselves whilst in Canada (around \$10,000 CAD). However, international students argue that this amount of money was unrealistic to expect a first-year student to have. International students reported borrowing this fund temporarily to enable them to secure a bank statement to be submitted to the visa office. Once they get their visa, they return this money to their lenders (Calder et al., 2016). Even if students had this fund, they express that the amount is not even enough to support themselves adequately in Canada, and called for more accurate and accessible information regarding the real costs of living in Canada (Calder et al., 2016).

Peel in the Media

In recent years the refusal rate of study permit applications has skyrocketed. The rate was 31% in 2016, 34% in 2018, and then jumped to 40% in 2019 and 53% in 2020 (Keung, 2021). It has been suggested that this large increase from 2018 onwards is due to a new AI-based program used in immigration processing called Chinook (Keung, 2021).

Recruitment Agents

Given the (perceived) complexity of the student visa process, recruiting agents often are the primary source of knowledge and facilitate students' application process. International students often perceive a need to engage with recruitment agents, who, ironically, are reported by students in Peel as being extremely stress-inducing. Students have to navigate complex, exacting processes whilst also paying the recruiting agents that they felt “looted” by (PNSG, 2018, p. 23). There are also significant differences between recruitment experiences in urban and rural areas; in the former, international students are seen to have much better access to various agents and thus institutions. Describing their experiences with recruiters, international students report overall negative experiences that should be avoided altogether if one has the wherewithal to complete the processes on their own. Cases of abuse are also reported, wherein recruiters demand more money whilst threatening to block visa applications (PNSG, 2018).

In an audit by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario (2021) into the Ontario college sector, four public colleges were reviewed in-depth. The audit found that the

“number of contracted recruitment agencies varied from about 40 to 400” (p. 30). Importantly, the audit also found that public colleges conduct very limited oversight on the operations of these recruitment agencies despite it being their responsibility. This was significant as seven out of the 100 contracted recruitment agencies had inaccurate information on their websites (OAGO, 2021). It was also found that the commission structure incentivized recruitment agencies to simply maximize enrolment without any accountability as to the quality of the process itself (OAGO, 2021).

Peel in the Media

It was found that many international students were “misinformed by consultants in India to work under the table for cash and beyond the 20-hour work restrictions” (Keung, 2021). The Peel Regional Council recently heard a delegation that outlined student recruitment programs as a challenge (Peel Regional Council [PRC], 2021). One student reported being charged \$8,000 more than he should have been by a recruiter. After declining, he spent \$1,700 on an agent to get him into a private career college (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

Bascaramurty et al., (2021) reports on a recruitment ecosystem full of “language schools, recruiters, immigration consultants and lenders...promis[ing] a new life, jobs, houses and prosperity and ... a chance at the ultimate prize: Canadian citizenship. But for many, the dream doesn't mesh with the reality.”

Experiences During Postsecondary Education

An extensive body of research has examined the adjustment and adaptation processes of international students as they transition to their postsecondary education in Canada. Research highlights the importance of postsecondary education institutions' campuses as important sites for engagement: socially, culturally, academically, and professionally. The vast majority of research has concentrated on international students' initial transitions and their first-year experience at their host institutions, differentiating between their on and off campus experiences. More recently, a new body of research focusing on international students' transition from their postsecondary education to the Canadian labour market has emerged. This research argues that international students are highly dependent on their postsecondary education experience through all their years of study to prepare them for their transition into the labour market and into Canadian society.

The following section reports on international students' experiences while they are enrolled at a Canadian postsecondary education institution. This includes their experiences within their academic institution and/or their host community.

Academic Experiences

Studies reveal that international students are generally satisfied with their educational experience in Canada (CBIE, 2018, Scott et al, 2015). For example, a CBIE survey note that approximately 93% of international students enrolled in public institutions state that they are either satisfied (55%) or very satisfied (38%) with their educational experience, and 96% of students would definitely (67%) or probably (29%) recommend Canada as a study destination (CBIE, 2018). Almost all students (95%) state that they are succeeding in meeting the academic demands of their program, with 57% responding that they are having a lot of success and 38% responding that they are having some success (CBIE, 2018). Similarly, Scott et al (2015) reveal that international students hold their educational experience in high regard and speak positively about the caliber of education and international student-serving programs and services available from their respective institutions. Postsecondary education institutions are perceived as a “home” to international students in Canada (Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar et al., 2014).

Despite this generally positive experience with postsecondary education institutions, international students also report some academic challenges. Some scholars report that varying levels of English proficiency tend to result in lower academic performance for some international students (Chen & Skuterud, 2020; Lipson, 2010; Scott et al., 2015). Kang (2020) argues that some of the linguistic challenges stem from the widespread practices and policies that prioritize ‘standard’ English (i.e., English that is widely recognized as expected and acceptable wherever English is used in Canada) in academic settings. Interestingly, this gap is not found to decrease in magnitude over the course of the international students’ studies (Chen & Skuterud, 2020). Surprisingly, international students with Canadian secondary school diplomas are found to especially underperform, which is explained by the lack of predictivity of secondary grades (Chen & Skuterud, 2020). However, it is important to note that the average academic performance of international students is increasing, even with increased international student enrolments (Chen & Skuterud, 2020). Nonetheless, it is important to note that not all international students face academic challenges. In STEM fields, where language places a smaller role as compared to the humanities and social sciences, international students tend to academically outperform their domestic peers in Canada (Pinder, 2014).

As international students enter the Canadian education system, they must learn and navigate a new set of norms and expectations pertaining to academic integrity, different faculty/student roles, academic norms, teaching styles, and more. Since academic integrity is not conceptualized uniformly across the world, international students often are not aware of or have difficulty meeting Canadian academic integrity standards (Lipson, 2010; PNSG, 2018). Due to differing conceptions of academic integrity, international students often need extra assistance that is culturally comparative in order to learn and operationalize Canadian academic integrity (Lipson, 2010; PNSG, 2018). The same need is also applied to concepts such as self-directed learning, as in many

cultures directed teaching is the preferred mode of instruction (PNSG, 2018).

International students have expressed that Canada has a unique academic context that is characterized by professors available to assist (rather than lead) students, encourage independent learning, and focus on assessments that boost interpersonal skills (Scott et al., 2015).

Peel in the Media

“Being in this new country, they didn’t know about the law. One student kept on talking about how she almost failed her course because there’s no such thing as plagiarism in India.” (Keung, 2021). It was also found that working multiple jobs and living in shared accommodations had adverse effects on academic performance (Keung, 2021).

International students’ preparedness for postsecondary graduate studies has been questioned in the media. Bascaramurty et al. (2021) reports on language centers in India that offer crash exam-oriented courses and even questions the authenticity of the certificates they offer. Bascaramurty et al. (2021) states “in an industry the size of India’s, with so many players, addressing exploitation in the recruitment process is difficult. There are roughly 5,000 to 6,000 IELTS centres in Punjab alone offering coaching for students who will take the standardized English test, according to The Tribune, an English newspaper based in Chandigarh. In 2018, Niagara College retested hundreds of international students who were suspected of providing fraudulent IELTS scores on their language admission tests, since so many were struggling in class due to poor English skills.”

Institutional Support Services

Although there has been an increase in the student supports provided to international students by higher education institutions, the level of programming and support varies between different types, sizes, and location of institutions (Reichert, 2020). Scholars observe that programs and support for international students have often struggled to keep pace with the rapid increase in the number of international students attending postsecondary education institutions in Canada (Lowe, 2011; Reichert, 2020). Kang (2020) notes that students tend to make use of language, academic, and financial supports. These supports are seen to help overcome cultural/educational challenges and relieve financial stress (Kang, 2020).

Although much work has been done to create a support ecosystem for international students, they tend to be underutilized by international students (BCCAT, 2015; Chira, 2013). Kang (2020) argues that this is due to lack of awareness of the availability of these services, feelings of vulnerability, lack of cultural and linguistic sensitivity, perceived racism, and a perception that they need to handle their academics on their own (Kang, 2020). This prompts international students to seek support through other international students or the Internet rather than from their campus support offices

(BCCAT, 2015; Chira, 2013; PNSG, 2018). Similarly, in the Peel context, it is reported that formal supports such as international student centres are perceived to be not very effective because of feelings that staff are not properly qualified to give verified information on immigration⁴ (PNSG, 2018). Students find themselves turning to informal supports such as family/friends, faith groups, student groups, and more (Kang, 2020; PNSG, 2018).

Peel in the Media

It was found that support services in educational institutions are often not sensitive to students' cultural needs (Keung, 2021). One student spoke about the importance of support in multiple languages: "When you're lonely, you don't want to speak from the brain, you want to speak from the heart, right?" "If I'm talking in Punjabi to you, I'm going to be talking more from my heart" (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

The (lack of) availability of career support services at postsecondary education institutions is identified as a major theme. El Masri et al. (2015) report that support services tend to be focused on international students' initial start as students, rather than later in their student career when employability becomes an increasing concern (El Masri et al., 2015). International students have been very vocal in asking for employment support (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Esses et al., 2018; Nunes & Arthur, 2013; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar et al., 2014). Research reveals that international students perceive their postsecondary education institutions as playing a key role as brokers with immigration officials and future employers (Trilokekar et al., 2014; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016). This includes networking opportunities, job boards, internship/coop opportunities and more. Students have identified that the processes required to succeed in the labour market are best started early and desire this support to begin even before/upon arrival, as well as continuing after graduation. More subtly, students have also identified specific norms and cultural knowledge that they would like their institutions to offer them, as they are seen as integral in achieving positive labour market outcomes (Arthur & Flynn, 2013; Nunes & Arthur, 2013; Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016).

One-Size-Fits-All Approaches

A common through-line in much of the literature is the idea that the term 'international student' does not do the lived experiences of international students in Canada justice. While the category is useful for administrative purposes to design programs and support

⁴ This speaks to the context when immigration advice became suddenly regulated in 2014 when, at the time, the vast majority of Canadian institutions did not have regulated advisors and consultants (expanded upon in the Immigration section). While most postsecondary education have invested in ensuring that their staff are certified to provide immigration advice, this seems to be limited to the early stages of international student cycle (i.e., student visa) rather than later stages (PR applications).

eligibilities, the needs of international students are seen to be incredibly diverse and unique (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010; Chira, 2013; Kenyon et al., 2012; PNSG, 2018; Trilokekar et al, 2014). International students come from vastly different cultures and often benefit significantly from culturally relevant supports as opposed to one-size-fits-all supports (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010; Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016).

For example, international students require significantly different language supports. Some do not require any support, others require support to improve their English language proficiency, and others require more nuanced language support with respect to norms and registers. Additionally, international students vary widely in their awareness of and access to community and ethnic support services. Some benefit from strong and active immigrant support groups represented within their community while others do not (Kang, 2020).

Private/Public-Private Postsecondary Education Institutions

Postsecondary education scholarship has paid little attention to the private education sector, including private career colleges (PCCs), prompting some to refer to it as the “invisible sector” (Li & Jones, 2015). Recently an audit by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario (2021) uncovered many concerning practices in the public-private sector. The report found that “five of the six public colleges with private college partners could have incurred operating deficits had they not received international student partnership revenue in 2019/20” (p. 3). It was also found that five of the six partnerships exceeded the limit on international students (twice the amount of home campus enrolment), but only three submitted a plan to fix their ratio. Moreover, this has all been done without any Ministry assessment or deadlines (OAGO, 2021). In addition, it was found that most public-private partnerships have not had their private partners' quality assurance processes independently audited (OAGO, 2021).

In examining media coverage of international education during the period of 2005-2017, El Masri (2019) reports on extensive media coverage of incidents of scams and frauds by some private career colleges targeting international students⁵. In tracking media stories on unregistered, unaccredited, or substandard private institutions, El Masri (2019; 2020b) notes that some international students choose to take legal action, others resort to the media to express their frustration over private career colleges' broken promises and false advertising, and others are reportedly silenced by these private operators who take advantage of international students' fear of losing their legal status, the money they had already spent, or even contractual obligations (El Masri, 2019; 2020b). El Masri (2019) reports on the perception that Public-Private partnerships are tarnishing the reputation of Canada's educational sector and jeopardizing the integrity of the immigration system. The main critiques of these partnership are: lack of

⁵ Whereas these private colleges enrol domestic students as well, who may have had similar concerns, it is the international student dimension that was highlighted in the media.

regulation to ensure the quality of the academic experience; production of ghettos where international students from a certain background do not integrate with either domestic or other international students; instruction is provided by the private college at a lower cost where students do not set a foot in the public partner institution; in addition to concerns of accountability, liability, and credential integrity (El Masri, 2019). The Ministry of Colleges and Universities was critiqued for not “having the tools to monitor the quality of the student experience at the private-branch campuses, including whether they are meeting academic standards, providing support services, and whether students are satisfied with the program” (Chiose, 2018).

In response to issues of exploitation, committees have been convened in Peel to examine international students' experiences focusing on the impact of private colleges (Brampton Committee of Council, 2021).

Peel in the Media

A significant amount of international students stated they come to Brampton because of the many private colleges, “which are seen as more affordable and easier to gain admission to with a lower language proficiency score” (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

Private colleges are seen as “selling degrees and diplomas as a path toward a permanent home in Canada” (Callan, 2021). These colleges are criticized for not providing proper support for their students but taking their fees nonetheless (Callan, 2021).

An international student “learned quickly that the way a career college operates is quite different from the publicly funded postsecondary institutions. Many programs had classes on weekends only, which freed up students to work during the week. In his first few days in class, he was stunned to see that nearly every other student was also Indian. Most were teenagers and seemed woefully unprepared for the basics of the course” (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

Racism and Discrimination

Despite the overall satisfaction levels with their academic experiences, some international students report feelings of being racialized and being viewed as cultural others. The report on perceptions of being invisible to their domestic classmates and teachers; concerns that their values are not respected or appreciated; and feelings that curriculum and pedagogy are mainly North-American-based which leads to feelings of discomfort and insecurity in their new classrooms (Guo & Guo, 2017; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Gui et al., 2016; Scott et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2013; Tavares, 2021; Trilokekar et al, 2014).

Houshmand et al. (2014) categorize the racial microaggressions that international students face into six themes: exclusion and avoidance; accent ridicule; invisible

treatment; disregarded values/needs; perception of intelligence; and structural barriers. These microaggressions lead international students to limit their engagement to that with their own racial/cultural groups, isolate themselves, and seek comfort in multicultural spaces (Houshmand et al., 2014). Students report facing racism because of minor language errors, their accents, and unwarranted accusations of cheating (Kang, 2020). These reports are validated by observations from faculty members who report observing classmates discriminating against international students as well as by service providers who also report incidents of racism and discrimination (Smith, 2016).

Peel In the Media

Students often feel their actions are treated with discrimination regardless of what they choose. "Students are often mocked for living in basements, but then treated with suspicion if they start to live more comfortably. If they get a car, a necessity for many jobs in a city as sprawling as Brampton, they're chastised for living beyond their means" (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

Social/Cultural Networks

Canadian-international friendships are seen to be steps to quality social, cultural, and even academic experiences. They were seen to help build language ability, develop intercultural communication competencies, exchange cultural norms, grow roots in Canadian society, build social and professional networks, and achieve positive labour market outcomes (Chira, 2013; Esses et al., 2018). After all, one of the main objectives of internationalization of higher education is to create a space and culture that promotes intercultural interactions and exposure to different perspectives, languages, and cultures (Larsen & Al-Haque, 2016).

International students report wanting to make Canadian friends but feeling as though linguistic and cultural differences serve as strong barriers inhibiting their ability to make Canadian friendships (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Chira, 2013; Li & Tierney, 2013; PNSG, 2018; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar et al., 2014). International students' social networks seem to consist primarily of co-nationals and other international students (Chira, 2013; Esses et al., 2018; Houshmand et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2015). International students perceive making friends with domestic students to be difficult which is especially true for international students (but not exclusively) whose first language is not English (Arthur and Flynn, 2011). International students report instances where they are shunned, devalued, and discriminated against, which led them to seek safer socialization with members of their own racial and cultural groups (Houshmand et al., 2014). Some students feel that their academic program does not provide adequate interaction with Canadian students, suggesting the need for a programmatic approach to address this challenge (Li & Tierney, 2013).

In the Peel context, international students feel as though they live differently from their domestic peers and find that they are always expected to initiate a friendship, rather than the other way around. Cultural clashes are also seen to be of importance. That is practices like shaking hands or making eye contact are culturally situated and can cause interpersonal difficulties if parties are on opposite pages (PNSG, 2018).

Peel in the Media

International students in Peel are reported to lack social supports and face a range of cultural barriers (Callan, 2021; Heck, 2021).

It was found that lack of English knowledge leaves many international students isolated from available supports (Bramptonist, 2021).

It was also found that Brampton is a “soft place to land [for Indian students]: There’s easy access to gurdwaras, restaurants that serve familiar food and grocers that stock Maggi” (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

Health and Wellbeing

International students’ change of diet, (lack of) knowledge of services, and inability to navigate the healthcare system lead to negative health and wellbeing outcomes (PNSG, 2018; Shankar et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2013; Xiao, 2020). International students undergo a large change in diet when they move to Canada. They have to learn to navigate an entirely new healthcare system which is reported to be incredibly expensive for international students (PNSG, 2018). These factors can lead to missed health opportunities, general stress, and other negative health outcomes (Smith et al., 2013). Therefore, international students are reportedly more prone to migraines, extreme fatigue, and trauma flashbacks (Shankar et al., 2013). Proportionally, international students tend to use health services more than domestic students (Smith et al., 2013). There are also gender differences noted, wherein male students find it difficult to openly share their emotions and feelings due to sociocultural norms related to masculinity (Xiao, 2020).

Racism is also seen to have a compounding effect on international students in Peel. Students already feel lonely and isolated (Hari et al., 2013), and are further marginalized by racism, pushing them deeper into isolation and lower mental health (PNSG, 2018) and increasing the likelihood of developing addictions (PRC, 2021). It is also reported that international students in Peel are not likely to reach out to mental health supports unless the problem is severe (PNSG, 2018). International students also raise concerns about sexual exploitation and human trafficking in the Peel context (PRC, 2021).

Peel in the Media

There have been a significant number of international students from India passing away due to drug overdoses and suicide (Callan, 2021; Dhimi & Debebe, 2021; Heck, 2021). In response to these deaths, a charity (Sunoh) has been created “to educate international students from India about the reality of learning in Canada, while also working to support those that have already arrived” (Callan, 2021).

Students have reported feeling incredibly lonely and depressed (Bascaramurty et al., 2021). These problems have been linked to the lack of financial sustainability international students face (Bramptonist, 2021).

A significant number of international students were found to be “moderately to severely food insecure,” missing meals and compromising on quality (Keung, 2021).

Living Conditions

International students are seen to struggle navigating the housing market due to unfamiliarity with the system, lacking connections, cultural differences, language barriers, and complex paperwork (Sheridan College, 2020; PNSG, 2018). Studies report on international students' difficulty with finding affordable and suitable housing, having to face alleged abuse and discrimination from landlords (Calder et al., 2016; CBIE, 2018; PNSG, 2018; PRC, 2021). The primary difficulty with finding a suitable housing arrangement for international students in Canada is seen to be the cost of rent (Calder et al., 2016). CBIE (2018) reports on a decrease of both affordability and accessibility of student housing calling for close monitoring of the situation by stakeholders across the international education sector.

Concomitant with the financial challenges, several other reasons have surfaced in the Peel context. International students coming to Peel, and Canada in general, must learn an entirely new housing system, and thus often are not aware of their rights and responsibilities. This leads to cases of abuse such as overcrowded housing, illegal basement units (PRC, 2021), overcharged rent and deposits, the student bearing maintenance costs, and other abuses (PNSG, 2018). Students are also seen to not have knowledge of where and how to find housing. They also lack credit history which makes finding housing all the more difficult (PNSG, 2018). Racism and discrimination are seen as factors hindering international students' ability to access the housing market as landlords are perceived to discriminate based on students' immigration status, race, or names (PNSG, 2018).

Peel in the Media

International students in Peel are reported to face problems finding housing which range from lack of affordable housing to lodging violations (Callan, 2021; Heck, 2021).

International students note that “to live on campus was unthinkable for many of the Indian international students the Globe and Mail spoke to – a luxury only domestic students could afford” (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

International students have been reported to be unable to pay rent and are “forced to cram themselves into basement units due to lack of housing supports provided by the educational institutions” (Bramptonist, 2021). Students also reported being scammed, as well as being surveilled by illegally installed cameras (Keung, 2021).

The surge in student population in Brampton was found to create “a lucrative but dangerous underground economy” (Bascaramurty et al., 2021). “In 2019, Brampton logged almost 1,600 complaints about illegal secondary units, many of them in basements. The city’s fire inspectors have been called to overcrowded rooming houses where mattresses have been found on every possible surface, including the kitchen floor. It’s a perennial issue discussed at Brampton city council with no easy solution” (Bascaramurty et al., 2021). This has led Sheridan College to cap the number of international students they admit so as to not bring in more than could be supported properly (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

Describing a housing situation, an international student describes it as “dehumanizing: Insects infested the living space and the water would get cut off without notice. Complaints to the landlord about the state of disrepair were rarely addressed. Rentals like this, the listings for which explicitly target students, dominate the local online classifieds in the Canadian cities where Indians on study permits have settled. In Brampton, which has a massive shortage of purpose-built rentals, the surge in the student population has created a lucrative but dangerous underground economy” (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

Financial Challenges

International students are exposed to many financial risks such as fluctuating exchange rates, reliance on family savings, and rising international tuition fees, creating financial uncertainty (Calder et al., 2016; Chira, 2013; PRC, 2021). The common through-line in these causes is not only that they are financially draining, but that they are unpredictable. This unpredictability creates an additional and compounding layer of precarity in that international students do not have the information they need to accurately plan and prepare for their future. This is even further compounded by the aforementioned lack of accurate information prior to arrival that international students face.

Another challenge identified by international students is the lack of financial support from the government (primarily) and postsecondary institutions. Financial aid and scholarships are often only available for domestic students (Chira, 2013; PNSG, 2018; Scott et al, 2015; Trilokekar et al, 2014). Students note that opportunities such as the

Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) and many research grants are only available to domestic students (Chira, 2013; PNSG, 2021). This contrast in financial aid availability is perceived as an unfair advantage to domestic students and further decreased international students' economic security (PNSG, 2018).

While international students are allowed to work during their postsecondary education studies which helps address their financial needs, they are limited in terms of the number of hours they can work and face many challenges in the labour market as will be discussed in the following section.

Peel In the Media

It was found that many students can't afford tuition and the cost of living due to restrictive employment policies (20-hour/week limit). Families often sold assets to send their child to school and the child then sends money home to support them (Heck, 2021). "The amount of pressure put on them to send money back home to their parents to cover the debt was one stress. The second was to be able to work enough hours to pay the bills to continue in school to make sure they're able to sustain themselves" (Keung, 2021).

"Every semester, Mani would scramble to pay his college fees by borrowing money everywhere he could: \$3,000 from the loan his parents took out after putting up their farmland as collateral, \$2,000 from a relative in Vancouver, \$1,000 that he'd take out on a credit card. If there was more owed, sometimes he'd ask his parents for more" (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

It was also found that working multiple jobs and living in shared accommodations had adverse effects on academic performance (Keung, 2021).

COVID-19

It is argued that COVID 19 has compounded the challenges that international students face such as the need for community/social support building, adaptation to Canadian academic culture, travel barriers, financial needs, and overall wellness (Sharma & Esson, 2021). International students have been one of the vulnerable groups during the COVID 19 pandemic experiencing psychological and financial hardships (Firang & Mensah, 2021). It is reported that international students have increased exposure to COVID-19 given the nature of their housing conditions; experience loss of income due to layoffs and/or inability to access their parental financial support; and are challenged by volatile travel restrictions (Chen, 2020; Firang, 2020). Dougay (2021) found international students to be heavily food insecure during the COVID-19 pandemic.

El Masri and Sabzalieva (2020) note that postsecondary education institutions were quite proactive in providing support to international students in many ways such as facilitating their return to their home countries, supporting them with the move to online education, and providing emergency bursaries. However, international students were

not eligible for governmental relief programs aimed at supporting Canadians, such as the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) and only those who were working in Canada prior to the pandemic had access to Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) (Firang, 2020; Firang & Mensah, 2021; Jenei et al., 2020).

Peel In the Media

A local non-profit, Punjabi Community Health Services directed a large portion of their 2020 budget to assisting international students financially due to the pandemic. Sheridan College gave students over \$1,000,00 in bursaries as well (Bascaramurty, 2021).

Transition into the Labour Market

This section reviews studies that examine the international student experience just prior to and after graduation, as the student seeks to find employment in Canada, focusing on their experiences in accessing the labour market and navigating immigration processes.

Many international students seek work opportunities during their postsecondary education studies in order to gain the valued Canadian work experience in preparation for a career in Canada or abroad (BCCAT, 2015; PNSG, 2018). International students' main rationale to work during studies is to gain Canadian experience which is critical to their immigration plans. In fact, this rationale comes ahead of defraying costs (BCCAT, 2015). This Canadian experience is seen as necessary for a few reasons, chief among them being the lack of recognition of foreign experience by employers and professional regulators. Although Canadian experience is seen as primary (BCCAT, 2015), defraying costs (tuition fees and cost of living) is still a heavy burden carried by international students. International students (who have working hour limits placed upon them) report often having to take up multiple jobs to pay for their education (Chira, 2013; PNSG, 2018; PRC, 2021).

A CBIE report (2018) revealed that 56% of international students surveyed indicated having difficulty finding work. This stems from a variety of reasons such as not having enough work experience, not finding appropriate jobs to apply to, having no time to work, a sense of employer discrimination against international work experience, cultural differences, restricted eligibility to work in Canada, and the challenge of investing scarce time and energy into networking (CBIE, 2018).

(Lack of) Professional Networks

In determining the key factors for international students landing a job after graduation, relationships and networking are significantly important (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014). International students perceive that they lack professional, personal, and social

networks which are critical to labour market success (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Bepple, 2014; Chira, 2013; Morris-Lange & Brands, 2015; Nunes and Arthur, 2013; PNSG, 2018; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar et. al, 2014, 2016, 2019). While domestic students often have many more years to build professional connections on top of usually having more family and friends in Canada, international students are forced to navigate a labour market that is network-dependent without the crucial advantage domestic students are perceived to have (Chira, 2013; Dauwer, 2018; PNSG, 2018; Scott et al, 2015; Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016; 2019). Similarly, reports from the Peel context indicated that networking is culturally situated, and the way in which networking happens in Canada is far different from that of other cultures. Therefore, some argue that international students need support in learning the Canadian norms of networking (PNSG, 2018).

Need for Professional Support Services

As discussed earlier, many scholars note that while international students' service during the first years at higher education institutions tend to be available through international student offices, it dwindles as they approach their graduation. Scholars note that many postsecondary education institutions provide limited, if any, services to graduated international students (El Masri et al., 2015; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016). This challenge is heightened after graduation as international students are not eligible to access services of settlement agencies. This prompted many scholars to recommend enhancing the delivery of international student support services at postsecondary education institutions including employment support and immigration support as well as allowing international students to access such services through community and settlement agencies (e.g., Arthur & Flynn, 2011; 2013; Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010; Kelkar, 2016; Nunes & Arthur, 2013; Smith et al., 2013).

Peel in the Media

Community organizations have started playing a role in supporting international students through advocacy and support programs (Callan, 2021; Heck, 2021).

Sheridan College has found success in developing partnerships with multiple community agencies and building a holistic support system (Bramptonist, 2021).

Discrimination in the Labour Market

International students report facing significant discrimination in labour market processes, both in the job search and in the workplace (Arthur & Flynn, 2013; Chira, 2013; Nunes & Arthur, 2013; PNSG, 2018; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar et al., 2014). International students report on employers' perceived discomfort with difference, racism, lack of appreciation of international experiences, discrimination due to immigration

status (which in many cases stems from lack of awareness about regulations governing international students' work in Canada); and (perceived) limited English proficiency and/or accent (Arthur & Flynn, 2011, 2013; Bepple, 2014; Bouajram, 2015; Chen & Skuterud, 2018; Chira, 2013; CIC, 2015; Cobb, 2012; Dauwer, 2018; Larocque, 2018; Li, 2014; Li & Tierney, 2013; Morris-Lange & Brands, 2015; Nunes & Arthur, 2013; Roach, 2011; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016; 2017; Trilokekar et al., 2014; 2016; 2019).

Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri (2016; 2019) note that employers are not simply interested in 'hard' skills in making hiring decisions. Instead, many describe 'soft skills' and cultural 'fit' as more important. However, Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri (2016; 2019) highlight the need to carefully unpack this discourse of 'soft skills' and cultural 'fit' and question it as potentially a discriminatory practice. International students need to learn to better communicate the skills they have acquired through their education and prior experiences and how they translate to success at work in Canada. Trilokekar et al. (2016; 2019) also identify the need for advocacy to shift the discourse around international students' soft skills from a deficit model to one that acknowledges a value-added approach.

Social and cultural barriers are seen as critical to professional integration (Belkhodja & Esses, 2013; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar et al., 2014). In order to integrate into the Canadian labour market, international students report that there are a set of barriers that face them, with language and cultural competencies appearing to be the largest of these barriers (Belkhodja & Esses, 2013). However, social factors are also of key importance. It is found that international students who do not achieve social connectedness with their host communities have a more difficult time integrating into Canadian work environments (Scott et al., 2015).

International students who succeed in accessing the labour market report facing discrimination due to their accents, language proficiency, and their international students' status (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Crosby, 2010; Chira, 2013; Nunes & Arthur, 2013; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar et al., 2014). According to international students, Canadian employers do not always recognize the value of a diverse labour force and (presumably) discriminate against them because of their international status, race, language ability and accents (Nunes & Arthur, 2013; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016). International students perceive an unwelcoming and difficult Ontario job market, limiting their ability to pursue their Canadian permanent resident status in Ontario.

It is important to note here that postsecondary institutions are seen as great employers for international students in that the institutions offer many opportunities for social engagement, and both appreciate the international students and make them feel comfortable (Trilokekar et al., 2014). Furthermore, Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri (2016; 2019) find that employers with formal diversity policies and/or who are required by legislation to have employment equity policies more actively recruit international

students and have programs to facilitate integration and retention of international students.

Peel In the Media

One student outlined an immigration hierarchy in Brampton: “If you are a citizen, you are at the top... If you are a permanent resident, you are treated better than others. If you are here on a work permit, they know you are desperate. You won’t be treated as an equal. If you are a student, you are at the very bottom of the food chain” (Bascaramurty et al., 2021).

Canadian Work Experience

Lack of Canadian work experience has increasingly been identified as a barrier to international student graduates’ transition to the labour market (Dauwer, 2018; Nunes & Arthur, 2013; Roach, 2011; Trilokekar et al; 2014; 2016; 2019). Canadian employers largely value Canadian work experience over international experience and view Canadian experience as a form of ensuring the student has been ‘tried and tested’ in the Canadian labour market (Scott et al., 2015, Trilokekar et al., 2014). However, this view makes it incredibly difficult for international students to get their first Canadian job because it requires experience that they do not have. Partnerships between postsecondary education institutions and employers that bridge students into the workforce such as co-op, internships, and research-industry partnerships have been reported as key to tackling this issue (Dauwer, 2018; Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016). While postsecondary institutions have many of these programs, international students still find it difficult to get their co-op, practicum, or internship opportunities, particularly securing the first one which would allow them to put their foot in the Canadian job market door (Dauwer, 2018; Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016; 2019).

Labour Market Outcomes

Scholars raise concerns with regards to the type of jobs that are accessible to international students. Scholars find that international students tend not to work in their field, are mostly working in minimum wage jobs (despite having Canadian credentials and sometimes foreign work experience); unpaid for vacation time or training, and underpaid compared to their domestic peers (PNSG, 2018; PRC, 2021; El Masri, 2019; Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016).

Many scholars observe an income gap between domestic and international graduates, with domestic graduates earning substantially higher salaries than their international counterparts (Choi et al., 2021; Finnie et al, 2019; Frenette et al., 2019). A 2015 report by IRCC notes that median earnings for Canadian recent graduates is at least double that of international graduates holding postgraduate work permits; hence, those

international graduates have become a large pool of temporary labour working largely in low-paid positions. Choi et al. (2021) note that deficiencies in pre-graduation work experience, including the number of years they worked and the amount of earnings they received while studying, account for most of their disadvantage in employment and earnings after graduation. Hou and Bonikowska (2015) argue that Canadian work experience matters more than Canadian study experience per se in affecting labour market outcomes international student graduates. WES (2019) reports that those with previous Canadian experience, for example international student graduates with Canadian pre-graduation work experience, not only have higher employment rates but are more likely to be working in employment commensurate with their skills. WES (2019) and Yssaad & Fields (2018) also report differentials in employment outcomes based on international student graduates' country of origin. This parallels research on new immigrants that also reports that immigrants from less developed regions have lower income levels during their early years in Canada.

Peel In the Media

Media reports that “these young immigrants are in danger of being exploited by employers and landlords, even criminal elements, increasing the risk they will be forced into precarious labour situations or even prostitution” (Callan, 2021; Heck, 2021). Sexual services in exchange for money was reported as being very common (Heck, 2021). Wage exploitation was also common, with students taking illegal shifts (past their 20-hour/week limit) and being exploited and paid far less than minimum wage (Bascaramurty et al., 2021; Nanwa, 2021). “So many choose to work under the table to make ends meet, living in cramped housing across Brampton and Mississauga, and are scared to speak up, lest they jeopardize their possibilities of getting permanent residency after school” (Heck, 2021).

Settlement Services

The complexity of international student lives (such as a student who graduated in one province but is now working and applying in another province) combined with limited access to settlement support services have left many international students without much needed support (Chira, 2013; Dauwer, 2018). Scholars note the importance of community support to international students' accompanying family members. It is found that students are far more likely to leave if their spouse/family has a difficult time integrating into Canadian society (Chira, 2013; Esses et al., 2018). While international students don't qualify for government-funded services in most cases, PNSG (2018) note that some services are available through institutions such as COSTI, Dixie Bloor, United Way of Peel, Indus Community Services, Peel Immigration Portal, and Newcomer Centre of Peel (PNSG, 2018).

Peel in the Media

It was found that international students, not being permanent residents, do not qualify for many government-funded settlement services (Keung, 2021). However, certain non-profits (Achêv and the Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Centre) in Mississauga were granted awards for their exceptional service to newcomers to Canada (Canadian Immigrant, 2021).

Immigration Regulations and Processes

International students report feeling confused, discouraged, or frustrated by the complexity and volatility of immigration processes (Chira, 2013; Dauwer, 2018; PNSG, 2018; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016). Consistent with the rigor of immigration processes, international students often must navigate complex applications, processes, and paperwork. This is done with a disappointing perceived lack of access and support to navigation of the immigration system (Chira, 2013; Scott et al, 2015; Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016). The system is also made especially hard to navigate as policies can change frequently and international students often do not have easy access to policy information relevant to their position (PNSG, 2018; Scott et al, 2015; Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016). Immigration processes have been described as “head-banging” by international students due to perceived poor customer service from the government that required multiple hour-long wait times and was characterized by being bounced to many different places just to receive unhelpful advice (Trilokekar et al., 2014). International students also complain about the immigration process being especially long in Ontario as opposed to other provinces such as Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, or Alberta that have processes that can get underway in under a year (Trilokekar et al., 2014). Scholars observe how postsecondary education institutions have invested in hiring trained and authorized professionals to provide immigration advice to international students (Bozheva, 2020; El Masri et al, 2015). Reichert (2020) observes that these professionals are challenged with staying up to date with changes to immigration policy and the limitations placed on postsecondary education institutions as to which staff members are able to provide immigration advice. Bozheva (2020) reports that the majority of these newly hired/trained professionals are authorized to provide advice pertaining to student visas and study permit application rather than support PR applications⁶. International students have very limited support when it comes to PR applications from their postsecondary education institutions as well as settlement agencies.

⁶ In July 2011 Bill C-35 was passed which highly regulated immigration advice and only allowed Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultants (RCICs) to give immigration advice, which heavily limited student access to advice. Not until 2015 did IRCC allow for an option suited to international students, Regulated International Student Immigration Advisers (RISIAs). The difference is that RISIAs can only support student visas and study permits, whereas RCICs can support PR applications (Bozheva, 2020). In 2020, only 27% of colleges had RISIAs and only 21% had RCICs. Universities had 29% and 26% respectively (Bozheva, 2020).

Employers' Lack of Understanding of the International Students' Immigration Status

Due to the aforementioned issues with immigration policies and procedures, among other reasons, employers appear to have a general perception of international students as being high-risk hires due to immigration red tape (Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016). Scholars report on employers' unwillingness to support international students' applications or processes due to the large amount of paperwork and government red tape around hiring international students (Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar et al., 2014; 2016; 2019). Employers tend to be ignorant of relevant immigration regulations and processes and many are unwilling to invest in training to learn about them (Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016; 2019). For employers, international students are described as risky hires due to the complexity and volatility of immigration regulations and processes as well as the uncertainty about international students' future plans and ability to stay in Canada (Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016; 2019).

The Peel context is no different. A PNSG (2018) report notes that international students from Peel report that even after having one's PGWP, employers still often view international students as temporary and do not want to take the risk to hire, train, and support them when they pose an apparent risk of leaving the country. In the Peel context, it was reported that differing immigration statuses lead to differing labour market outcomes, despite both indicating one is able to work in Canada (PNSG, 2018). For instance, a post-graduation working permit holding graduate may be seen as temporary or risky, whereas once permanent residency is landed, the job market appears to open up.

Recommendations Proposed by the literature

This section synthesizes recommendations posed by the academic literature into four major themes that address the challenges that international students face and aim to improve their experiences in Canada.

Collaboration is Key

Many studies have highlighted the role of multiple stakeholders in supporting the enactment of the federal and provincial policies that aim to recruit and retain international students and ensure that international students are well supported throughout. There is a need for strategic and planned international students' support through increased collaborative effort of federal and provincial governments, postsecondary education institutions, host communities, settlement organization and employers (Allison, 2020; Alboim, 2011; Dauwer, 2018; El Masri et al., 2015; Kelkar, 2016; Knutson, 2011; PNSG, 2018; Scott et al., 2015; Wade & Belkhodja, 2013). Collaboration allows for actors to address issues more holistically, create transparency, and remove duplication/redundancy of programs and services. This will ensure a more coherent and smooth policy and program development, successful implementation, and achievement of desired education and integration outcomes.

Those policies/ programs would adopt a holistic, collaborative and proactive approach incorporating aspects such as providing more specialized advising/support services; developing students' soft skills, creating professional training and networking opportunities; enhancing students' feelings of belonging; strengthening connections between postsecondary education institutions and employers; educating employers on the strengths of international students; and enhancing immigration processes (Knutson, 2011; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016; Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016). El Masri et al. (2015) note "what is required is partnership and collaboration between the university, provincial and federal government, CIC [which is now IRCC] and employers [and by extension community]" (p. 42) and present the following partnership model (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Partnership Model



Adapted from El Masri et al, 2015, p.42

Holistic Approach to International Student Experience

Academic, social, and professional support are factors that predict a positive experience and influence international students' academic success, psychological adaptation, emotional wellbeing, and overall satisfaction. A comprehensive and holistic approach to attend to their unique needs is required.

Pre-Arrival: Manage Expectations

- There is a need to ensure that transparent and accurate information about life in Canada is provided to students pre-arrival. This includes information on the cost of living, academic expectations, labour market prospects, etc.
- Institutions need to partner with trust-worthy recruiting agents to ensure trusted points of contact. Reliable recruiters are seen as valuable resources by students; however, they are hard to identify (PNSG, 2018).
- Ensuring ethical marketing and recruitment practices is essential.

During Postsecondary Education

Within the Academic Institution

- Because of the vast diversity of students that fall within the category of 'international student,' it is recommended that services be tailored to needs, rather than status (Kenyon et al., 2012; PNSG, 2018).
- There is also a need to provide more services throughout the year and the international students' course of study, as there tends to be a strong emphasis on the beginning of the year and their first year (El Masri et al., 2015; Guo & Guo, 2017; PNSG, 2018; Trilokekar et al., 2014).
- International students have recommended that faculty and fellow students become more aware of the difficulties they face, as they do not feel their lives are well understood by their colleagues (Kang, 2020).
- Students have also recommended more culturally relevant programming and representative curriculum, along with technological literacy workshops to learn the technologies that are often required in classes (Guo & Guo, 2017; Kang, 2020).
- International students often come from very different academic environments, and thus professional and culturally sensitive academic advising and supports are recommended, especially in relation to academic integrity and English communications (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010, Belkhodja & Esses, 2013, Kang, 2020; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014; Smith et al., 2013; Xiao, 2020). However, acculturation should go two ways. It is recommended that an atmosphere of cross-cultural information sharing be created in academic environments (PNSG, 2018).

- An anti-racist infusion is recommended for institutions and their services (Guo & Guo, 2017; Houshmand et al., 2014; PNSG 2018; Shankar et al., 2013). Anti-racist recommendations include staff training (Smith et al., 2013), workshop, intergroup dialogues, and support services for experiences of racism (Houshmand et al., 2014).
- Ensuring the diversity of the staff who serve international students is recommended in the literature. Racialized staff, staff with diverse international experiences and backgrounds, and staff who speak multiple languages are better poised to serve international students and understand their experiences and challenges (Kang, 2020). More broadly, international students desire an environment that embraces equity, diversity, and inclusivity (Xiao, 2020). It is recommended that institutions take a proactive approach to building a sense of community that enhances intercultural understanding (Smith, 2016). It is also recommended that postsecondary education institutions formally recognize international students as an equity-seeking group as part of larger structural reform (Tavares, 2021).
- Scholars note that within academic institutions, departments are often siloed. This leads to a fragmented approach to supporting international students. It is recommended that strong connections be built around international students' experiences such as between career services, counseling and wellbeing, and international departments (Smith et al., 2013).
- Educational institutions are called upon to include the settlement experiences of international students in their program and service planning (Dauwer, 2018). This includes a recommendation that educational institutions further invest in the RCICs and RISIAs to support international students' goals to work and live in Canada postgraduation (Bozheva, 2020). With the need for additional and improved services also comes a need for additional funding (Dauwer, 2018).
- It is recommended to ensure that private and private-public designated learning institutions are well-regulated to ensure quality and consistent academic standards and support services.

Settlement & Immigration

- There is a need for a supportive infrastructure at different levels of government to invest in support structures that fulfill a holistic immigration process (Esses et al., 2018; PNSG, 2018).
- Outside of the institution of study, settlement services are mostly unavailable to international students which is perceived as a lost opportunity (Belkhodja & Esses, 2013; Trilokekar et al., 2014). Settlement services are recommended to be made available not only to international students but also their dependents, the experiences of whom are critical to their wellbeing (Chira, 2013; Smith et al., 2013).

- Some scholars call for some amendments to the immigration regulations including:
 - review of NOC⁷ classifications and employment requirements for permanent residency applications
 - remove in-study restrictions such as limited working hours and job eligibilities
 - simplification, streamlining, and institutional collaboration with respect to immigration processes and policy information dissemination (PNSG, 2018)
 - additional funding to research and assessment of international student programs and services (Dam et al., 2018; Trilokekar et al., 2014).

Well-being: Economic, Social, and (Mental) Health

- Economic Wellbeing:
 - Clear expectations regarding cost of education and living in Canada should be provided to international students prior to arrival (PNSG, 2018).
 - International students should be educated as to their rights and responsibilities in the labour market to help reduce instances of exploitation (Smith et al., 2013).
 - International students have been outspoken regarding the desire for more financial support (Chira, 2013; Kang, 2020; Xiao, 2020). These include:
 - More access to merit-based scholarships that international students typically are not eligible to apply for because of their immigration status (Kang, 2020)
 - Need for access to need-based, timely financial which has been identified by international students in Peel as the greatest challenge they face (PNSG, 2018).
- Health and Wellness:
 - Health and wellness services such as counselling should be made as culturally relevant as possible to better accommodate international students' unique needs (Arthur & Popiaduk, 2010)
 - Mental health supports should be made available with differing language capacities, i.e., different English proficiencies and other languages (Xiao, 2020)
 - Access to physical and mental health support at reasonable/no extra cost to the student (Smith et al., 2013; Xiao, 2020). Some have called for the provincial government to better recognize its responsibilities to international students such as providing a health insurance plan (PNSG, 2018).

⁷ National Occupation Classification (NOC) codes serve to classify jobs under different categories. In order to immigrate through certain programs, prospective immigrants must demonstrate work experience in jobs that fall under certain NOC categories, thus highlighting the importance of NOC codes for international students.

- Develop policies for handling sexual assault instances that involve international students (Smith et al., 2013).
- Accommodate international students' religious or cultural dietary restrictions on campuses. It is recommended that campus eating options are diversified to better meet the dietary needs of international students (Smith et al., 2013).
- Social Wellbeing
 - Contact between international students and members of the host society is important for promoting intercultural knowledge among international and domestic students alike. Moreover, contact promotes the growth of social support networks, a lack of which has been previously shown to negatively affect the adjustment and wellbeing of international students in their host society (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).
 - International students have repeatedly expressed the need for formal and informal programming that put them in contact with domestic students (Gui et al., 2016; Kang, 2020; Li & Tierney, 2013; PNSG, 2018; Smith et al., 2013; Trilokekar et al., 2014). It appears that residence life programming accomplishes this well and should be looked to as a guide (Trilokekar et al., 2014).
 - While domestic contact is desired, there is also desire for a mentoring system that puts students in contact with someone of similar background (in addition to academic/professional contacts) so they can get first-hand, culturally relevant knowledge about integration and settlement (Kang, 2020; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014). It is recommended that institutions invest in training potential mentors such as mature post-graduate students (PNSG, 2018).
 - International students, especially those who are accompanied by their children for the duration of their studies, report a need for support to build social ties in their host communities and a sense of belonging necessary to facilitate intercultural learning and wellbeing (CBIE, 2018; PNSG, 2018). Municipalities can play a critical role here in inviting students to local events (PNSG, 2018).
- Housing
 - It is recommended to provide on-campus residence options that work for various living situations such as married, specific communities, summer living, etc. (Smith et al., 2013).
 - There is a need to create dedicated services and resources to help students secure off-campus housing (Sheridan College, 2020).
 - It is also very important to educate international students of their rights and responsibilities as tenants and empower them to report on any breaches they might face (Sheridan College, 2020; Smith et al., 2013).

- Further regulations and enforcements are needed to crackdown illegal practices of landlords.

Transition into the Labour Market: Facilitate Access to Meaningful Work Experiences

- Scholars draw attention to the value of internships and co-op experiences for international students (Trilokekar et al., 2014; 2016). Provincial and municipal governments have been identified as key players in connecting institutions with employers along with providing incentives for employers to participate in these connections (Dauwer, 2018).
- Career counselling departments at postsecondary education institutions are recommended to focus on helping international students articulate the value of their international experience and languages in the Canadian labour market (Belkhodja & Esses, 2013).
- It is recommended to include international students in established bridge programs that help immigrant professionals integrate into the labour market (Trilokekar et al., 2014).
- International students have been vocal about their desire for services that help them build professional networks, meet employers, and land pre-graduation work experience (Arthur & Flynn, 2013; Belkhodja & Esses, 2013; Chira, 2013; Nunes & Arthur, 2013; PNSG, 2018; Xiao, 2020). It is recommended that employers who have experience with PGWPs and experienced alumni serve as mentors to support international students grow their professional networks (Belkhodja & Esses, 2013; Esses et al., 2018).
- Informational resources about the labour market are also needed by international students, such as the Labour Force Survey, a resource that measures the state of the labour market that students can use to figure out which industries are in need (PNSG, 2018).
- It is important to carefully unpack employers' discourse of 'soft skills' and cultural 'fit' and ensure that employers refrain from discrimination against international students on the basis of their status, English level, etc. (Arthur & Flynn, 2013; Belkhodja & Esses, 2013; Nunes & Arthur, 2013).
- There is a need to further enforce regulations that protect international students from exploitative employers and substandard working conditions (PNSG, 2018).
- Employers should be educated on the value of international students and immigration laws to be better informed about hiring international students. Immigration myths should be cleared up and employers should have their concerns proactively addressed (Trilokekar et al., 2014; Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016; 2019). Increased advocacy is needed to shift the discourse around international students' soft skills from a deficit model to one that acknowledges a value-added approach (Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016; 2019).

- Some scholars shed light on some inherent contradictions between the policies that aim at retaining international students on one hand and funded student employment programs (such as the [Student Work Placement Program](#) and [Canada Summer Jobs](#)) which explicitly exclude international students with the rationale that the “temporary nature of an international student’s time in Canada does not allow for a long-term connection to the labour market” (as quoted in Mackenzie, 2021), an argument that works counter to the objective of encouraging international students to remain in Canada.
- It is recommended to consider opening government co-op and internship opportunities to international students. The federal Public Service Employment Act, introduced in 2010, prioritizes Canadian citizens above international students for student jobs, and in practice this means that very few international students are employed by federal departments and agencies. In some parts of the country these federally funded positions make up the vast majority of work-term opportunities, leaving international co-op students with few options (Trilokekar, Thomson & El Masri, 2016, 2019).

Change the Narrative

A recent study that examines the public discourse around international students note that while there are many proponents for the attraction and retention of international students for a diverse of reasons (e.g., financial, economic prosperity, research and innovation, educational enrichment), there is a growing discourse that opposes increasing international students’ recruitment and retention (El Masri, 2019, 2020a, b). Many scholars express concern on what they perceive as commodification of international students, perceiving them as ‘cash cows’, and programs that approach international students from a deficit model (El Masri, 2019; 2020a; PNSG, 2018; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016). In examining international education discourses in Ontario from 2005 to 2017, El Masri (2019, 2020b) observes the emergence, and growth, of the ‘Ontario first’ discourse which constructs international students as competitors with the more worthy Ontarians. This discourse perceives international students as competing with domestic students in accessing highly competitive educational programs, the Canadian job market, and scholarships/research funding opportunities (El Masri, 2019, 2020a, b). There is an impression that postsecondary education institutions favor high tuition fee paying international students over domestic students. Furthermore, international students are perceived to be contributing to the inflation of the housing markets as well as defrauding the immigration system and risking its integrity (El Masri, 2019, 2020a, b).

Scholars warn that similar discourses have recently emerged in different international jurisdictions, such as the United States, Australia and some European nations leading to different anti-immigration and nationalistic discourses and resultant policies as well as racist incidents (El Masri, 2019, 2020a, b; Popovic, 2013, Trilokekar and Kizilbash,

2013). El Masri (2019) highlights the critical role that the media plays in shaping the discourses around international education in general and international students in particular. There is a need to inform the public narrative around international students and invest (academic) energy in trying to understand the way in which the media contributes to the construction of international education (and hence influencing policymaking). To this end, collaboration between academics, professionals, and journalists is needed to reclaim the discussion of international education/students (El Masri, 2019). El Masri (2019, p. 295) highlights the need for “public intellectuals who can mediate between education, society, politics, and media.”

Don't Lose the Pulse: Research-Informed Practices

As international students are further encouraged to come to Canada, there must be corresponding support that is informed by student voices to help meet their transition needs (Arthur & Flynn, 2011, Houshmand et al., 2014). It is recommended that all stakeholders supporting international students seek out the latest research on international students, as it is constantly being updated. Even with improvement to service offerings, awareness remains a key issue that must be solved through increased outreach (Arthur & Flynn, 2013; Belkhodja & Esses, 2013; PNSG, 2018). It is recommended that research investigates students' experiences as early as outreach and connection starts prior to their arrival in Canada. A more dynamic relationship between research and practice needs to be established where research informs practice and vice versa. This literature review has revealed the following research gaps:

- There is an absence of studies that examine international students' experiences in the private postsecondary education sector (whether private career colleges and/or private-public partnerships), a sector that has been referred to in the literature as the “invisible” sector (Li & Jones, 2015). There has not been any research examining if/how international students' experience differs from one type of institution to the other or from one location in Peel region to the other.
- While studies focused on examining international students' experiences at a given postsecondary education institution or, in the case of few studies, within the labour market, there are no case studies that scrutinize the international students' lived experiences in a given community examining the services offered by the multiple actors: postsecondary education institutions, municipalities, host communities, settlement agencies, and employers and the coordination, or the lack thereof, between the different actors and its influence on the overall international students' experiences.
- The link between internationalization strategies of postsecondary education institutions with the demand for highly qualified labor on the local labor market

coming from business enterprises, research institutions and the public sector, is yet to be explored.

Conclusion

Despite the primarily economic positioning of international students by policymakers, it is important to acknowledge that the lived experience of postsecondary international students is multifaceted, as it is a human experience. International students face challenges in widely differing areas, from housing to academics to friendship to employment.

International students' experiences themselves are incredibly wide-ranging. International students come from different countries, different cultures, different academic environments, and more; this means that services designed to fit all international students will inevitably fall short. The report finds that there is a need to imbue international student services with flexibility and fluidity that can respond to diverse needs from diverse individuals. Examples of the aforementioned can be found in tailoring services to needs rather than categories or building networks of support that can move an international student fluidly to the appropriate service for their specific need and context.

International students were found to be desirous of making meaningful contributions to Canada, but key supports are missing that often lead to challenging and frustrating experiences. International students are locked out of many supports, with financial supports (scholarships and financial aid) and settlement services being of prime importance.

On a broader level, meaningful employment plays a critical role in the lives of international students. It serves to not only provide financial means, but also helps with integration and is key to successful immigration. The review found that a focus on only employment however is narrow in scope, as there is concomitant need for community support and settlement services as well. These key focuses highlight areas of need that, if taken up together, can provide international students with smooth, successful experiences in Canada.

This review of relevant literature finds that collaboration is incredibly integral to building the capacious infrastructure that international students so vocally request to support them through their journey. Stakeholders are urged to create high-quality communication and connective structures that help build the capacity of international student support networks.

While stakeholders in Peel excel at their respective responsibilities, the international student experience is heavily interconnected across the region and beyond and will require a support network that is reflective of this interconnected nature. The necessity

of this collaboration is underscored not only by the massive benefits international students bring to Canadian economy, culture, academe, and more, but by the responsibility we all have to create a truly respectful, equitable, and inclusive atmosphere.

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Appendix A

List of DLIs in Peel Region, extracted from [Designated learning institutions list - Canada.ca](#)

No	Type	Name of Institution	City	Campuses	Offers PGWPP eligible programs
		Mississauga			
1	Public	University of Toronto	Mississauga	Mississauga	Yes
2		Sheridan College	Mississauga	Hazel McCallion Campus	Yes
3	Public-Private	Canadore College at Stanford International College of Business and Technology	Mississauga	Brampton, Mississauga, Scarborough	Yes
4		Lambton College at Queen's College of Business, Technology and Public Safety	Mississauga	Mississauga	Yes
5		Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology at triOS College Business Technology Healthcare Inc	Mississauga	Mississauga	Yes
6		St. Clair College at Ace Acumen Academy	Mississauga	Mississauga	Yes
7	Private	A1-Global College of Health, Business, and Technology	Mississauga	East Campus, West Campus	No
8		Academy of Learning	Brampton	Brampton, Mississauga	No
9		Academy of Learning Career and Business College	Kingston, Mississauga	Kingston Campus, Mississauga Campus	No
10		ACE Acumen Academy	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
11		AIMS College Healthcare Management Technology	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
12		Algonquin Careers Academy	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
13		Anderson College of Health, Business and Technology	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
14		BITTS International Career College	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
15		BizTech College of Health Sciences, Business & Technology	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
16		Canadian Academy of Dental Health & Community Sciences	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
17		Canadian Business College	Mississauga	Mississauga	No

International Students' Lived Experiences

18		Canadian College of Business, Science & Technology	Brampton	Brampton, Mississauga, North York, Scarborough	No
19		Canadian College of Educators	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
20		Canadian Montessori Teacher Education Institute	Harrowsmith, Markham, Mississauga, Ottawa, Toronto	Harrowsmith, Markham, Mississauga, Ottawa, Toronto, Toronto East York	No
21		CareerQuest Inc.	Toronto	Toronto, Mississauga	No
22		CDI College of Business, Technology and Healthcare	Toronto	Brampton, Mississauga, North York, Scarborough	No
23		Central College of Business and Technology	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
24		Chef School	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
25		Chellsey Institute of Beauty and Health Inc.	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
26		CIMT College	Brampton, Malton, Mississauga, Scarborough	Brampton, Malton, Mississauga, Scarborough	No
27		CITI College of Canadian Careers	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
28		CRD College of Health Care	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
29		Epic College of Technology Inc.	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
30		Futures Canadian College of Business, Health and Technology	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
31		Heartland International English School	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
32		Innovations in Business Solutions Inc.	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
33		Institute of Machine Tool Technology	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
34		International Beauty Institute	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
35		Metalworks Institute of Sound & Music Production	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
36		Mississauga Career College	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
37		MLC College of Business, Technology and Healthcare	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
38		National Academy of Health & Business	Mississauga	Mississauga	No

International Students' Lived Experiences

39		Netsoft College of Technology	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
40		Newcastle College of Business & Technology	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
41		North American Business College of Sciences & Language	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
42		Ontario College of Business & Technology	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
43		Oxford College of Arts, Business and Technology Inc.	Scarborough	Scarborough, Toronto, Mississauga, Peterborough, Burlington	No
44		Peel College of Professional Studies	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
45		Queen's College of Business, Technology & Public Safety	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
46		Stanford International College of Business and Technology	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
47		Sunview College Business Technology Healthcare	Mississauga	Mississauga	No
48		Thompson Career College of Health and Business	Mississauga, Markham, London	Mississauga, Markham, London	No
49		triOS College Business Technology Healthcare Inc.	Mississauga	Mississauga Campus	No
50	Upper Highland College of Business and Technology	Mississauga	Mississauga	No	
Brampton					
51	Public	Algoma University	Brampton	Algoma at Brampton	Yes
52		Sheridan College	Brampton	Davis Campus	Yes
53	Public - Private	Cambrian College of Applied Arts and Technology at Hanson College of Business, Health and Technology	Brampton	Brampton	Yes
54		Canadore College at Stanford International College of Business and Technology	Mississauga	Brampton, Mississauga, Scarborough	Yes
55		Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology at Trios College	Brampton	Trios College - Brampton Campus	Yes
56		St. Clair College at Ace Acumen Academy	Brampton	Brampton	Yes
57	Private	Academy of Learning	Brampton	Brampton, Mississauga	No

International Students' Lived Experiences

58	Academy of Learning Career and Business College	Brampton	Brampton	No
59	ACE Acumen Academy	Brampton	Brampton	No
60	Beta College of Business and Technology	Toronto	Brampton, Toronto	No
61	BITTS International Career College	Brampton	Brampton	No
62	Brampton Skin Care Academy Inc.	Brampton	Brampton	No
63	Canadian College of Business, Science & Technology	Brampton	Brampton, Mississauga, North York, Scarborough	No
64	Career College Group	Brampton	Brampton Campus	No
65	CDI College of Business, Technology and Healthcare	Toronto	Brampton, Mississauga, North York, Scarborough	No
66	CIMT College	Brampton, Malton, Mississauga, Scarborough	Brampton, Malton, Mississauga, Scarborough	No
67	Clarkridge Career Institute	Brampton	Brampton	No
68	Dominion College of Business Health and Technology Inc.	Toronto	Toronto, Brampton	No
69	Eastview College Business Health Technology	Brampton	Brampton	No
70	Flair College of Management and Technology	Brampton	Brampton	No
71	Hanson College of Business, Health and Technology	Brampton	Brampton Campus	No
72	Jyot's Aesthetics Academy	Brampton	Brampton	No
73	Liaison College	Brampton	Brampton Campus	No
74	National Institute of Hairstyling and Advanced Aesthetics	Brampton	Brampton	No

International Students' Lived Experiences

75		Springfield College of Healthcare, Management & Technology	Brampton	Brampton	No
76		Stanford International College of Business and Technology	Brampton	Brampton	No
77		Sunview College Business Technology Healthcare	Brampton	Brampton	No
78		Torbram College of Business, Technology & Healthcare	Brampton	Brampton	No
79		triOS College Business Technology Healthcare Inc.	Brampton	Brampton Campus	No
Caledon					
80	Private	Brampton Flight Centre	Caledon	Caledon	Yes (details for Flight schools)